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LA BELLE SAN ANTONE

by

JOHONNAS BENNETT

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By

JOHONNAS BENNETT

UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON
THE NEALE PUBLISHING COMPANY
1909

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La Belle San Antone

CHAPTER I

The beautiful, boundless, and breezy realm of old Texas! How well beloved by her own since the first days of her coming to us, full of wild possibilities and daring adventure; her escutcheon baptized in the blood of the Spanish and Mexican wars, and the period of her annexation, so rife with the stench of unparalleled atrocities in the murder of her noble martyrs, her banners tattered and torn, and the star of her destiny, rising Phoenix-like from the ashes of the past, to grow for a brighter fate, a better day.

Come with me, and as we tread the bloom of her flower-strewn prairies and the burning sands of her lonely plains I will tell you about the hearts of her men and women, so true and loving and so unchanging in their fidelity; faithful, courageous and enduring; ever ready to extend their hospitality to the strangers at their doors, or to let their life-blood flow for loved ones endangered. For the beginning of the story herein told we find ourselves harking back to the days when she first began making history

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for herself, days when she was yet a Spanish province, and ruled by a Spanish monarch.

It was a hundred years ago, and more, that a bold herdsman, seeking as did Jason "the golden fleece," found the end of his journeyings as he reached the boundless plains of the beautiful Southwest. Fresh from adventures by sea and land, with a stout heart, a strong arm, and a splendid constitution, Theodore Hackett found himself tarrying for a day from his travels at a little semi-barbaric town far to the southwest. While he tarried his feet took root in the soil, and he grew to be a part of the place, its surroundings and its people. It was a place filled with mixed breeds of men, Spanish and French predominating, and the town was called indiscriminately by the two separate names given it by the predominating forces of Spanish or French, as the case might be. To-day it was de Bajar, as the old French explorers would have it, to-morrow it was San Antonio, so called for the head of the Franciscan Brotherhood, San Antonio Valges, who had established his mission here in the year 1716. From its earliest days the town was the scene of uprisals, fights, and dissension. It was most of the time the capital, and always an important military encampment; its settlement had grown out of the fierce rivalry between Spain and France for the possession of the town.

Probably no foot of ground in the great Empire State of the Southwest was ever so bitterly

contested as was this old French and Spanish military camp. By a royal decree in the year 1730 an effort was made by the King of Spain to colonize the new Southwest, and something near twenty families were brought from the Canary Islands for this purpose. To each family was given a large grant of land, and the heads of the families were raised to the dignity of a hidalgo.

The new colonists established the pueblo, or village, near the presidio, then more commonly called Plaza-de-las-Yslas. From these families sprang native-born men and women, who grew into maturity in the very midst of a "hand at the sword hilt" sectional feeling, and about them clung the air and bearing of a people accustomed to danger, and who fostered and engendered deep feelings, be it love or be it hatred, as the occasion should demand.

Among the colonists were men and women of good origin who had intermarried with the Spanish and French habitants of the town, whose coming had preceded that of the colonists, and the outcome of these unions was the founding of noble families.

Fourteen years later the old mission of San Antonio Valges was moved farther east, to the site occupied by the chapel of that mission, which is now known as the Alamo. Those were dreadful days when the historic old town gave its first habitation to man and began making history for herself.

During the long revolutionary war of Mexico with Spain the old town witnessed many scenes of strife and bloodshed. Revolutionist against Royalist engaged in bitter contest for the possession of the town, amid scenes of unparalleled atrocity. If to-day the Royalists won the victory, they turned upon their enemies with a thirst for revenge that appeased itself in bloody butcheries; if to-morrow the Revolutionists were victorious, it was but a cruel repetition of murdering their captives.

As though seeking to augment the reign of terror, the town became a favorite haunt for Spanish buccaneers and freebooters, who pillaged the place during the frequent uprisals.

Gay, reckless, devil-may-care fellows, by the witchery of their handsome faces and reckless mien they won the hearts of the young and beautiful senoritas of the old provincial town. Some of them married, and won from their lawless quest for booty by the glamour of love, settled into law-abiding men, while others wooed but for a day, and in the wake of their departure left sorrowing hearts and blighted lives to mark, as ghastly milestones, their lawless pilgrimage through life.

The town, all the time under military rule, was controlled by the faction in power. The citizens had become accustomed to the war-like spirit of the times, and men, women and children felt a consequent pride when their respective banners were waving victoriously over the town.

Hackett liked the wild, tumultuous life of the fort. The gay uniforms of the Spanish officers, their dark, swarthy faces, the soft, musical language of the Spanish tongue, the clanking of spurs and sabers made a brightly colored picture that pleased his fancy. The coffee-houses, where the motley crowd from the street gathered for their meals; the narrow, winding streets that passed the different shops, with here and there a pit for cock-fighting, with its never-varying crowd of booted and spurred caballeros, their dark faces beneath their peaked hats looking eager and intense as they watched the progress of the cock-fight—all this appealed to Hackett's adventurous soul. There had come a day of rest from the bloody contest, lasting longer than those that had gone before. Gutierrez and Delgado, with their terrible troops, had been driven back and the Royalists held the town under the heavy hand of Salcedo's garrisoned troops. The silken-girdled matador and the bull-ring, the cock-pit and chicken-fighting had supplanted the clash of battle and the victor's triumphant cry.

These were blithe, stirring days, such as could not fail to appeal to Hackett's adventurous nature. He had first seen the light of day among old Scotia's hills, born of an ancient Scotch clan numbering in its time many a hard rider and good fighter, and more than one of whose petty chieftains, half shepherd and half robber, had made good the winter inroads into

their stock of beeves by spring forays and cattle drives across the English border. He had wandered from his native heath, driven by a strong desire to visit the unknown and unexplored regions—never retracing, but always pressing farther on, seldom stopping long at any one place. At the close of a twelve-month of service in the employ of the shipyards at Lisbon he boarded a cruiser, turning his face toward the New World, still in search of his "golden fleece." After many thrilling and hair-breadth escapes his vessel struck on Matagorda Island, off San Antonio Bay, and with a small leathern wallet of golden doubloons he made his way up the river until he arrived at the little beleaguered town above the forks of the river. Here he rested for a season of pleasure and to familiarize himself with the place and its people.

CHAPTER II

Hackett soon made a careful survey of the town, making a mental inventory of its people, and rounded up for the finish at "The King's Tavern," a rakish-looking place with low, smoke-begrimed roof, and a dingy bar, where a Spaniard with a pointed, jetty goatee dispensed his intoxicants to the frequenters of his place. It was a beastly night outside, for the spring slush was on and a terrific equinoctial storm was raging, driving all kinds of men to hunt shelter, and "The King's Tavern," on Navarro street, was filled with a motley crowd, ready for sport at the first available opportunity. Black clouds swept their trailing skirts over the town with a beating downpour of rain; deafening peals of thunder broke with booming crashes, the lurid flashes of the reports ripping the black clouds in zigzag lines, but the rain-drenched men entering the low, wide door of the tavern left the battle of the elements behind, and entered with zest and vigor into their rude enjoyments and ribald gaiety. Hackett drank with them, laughed with them, and before he had been long in their midst was one of them in the games at the gambling tables. "A Lion of the tribe of Mexico" he was dubbed by the spokesman of the wet, steamy,

tobacco-scented crowd, and a general toast all around was ordered and drunk to his health.

This was Hackett's initiation into the "gilt-edged" gambling element of Bexar, and he had not been a week in the town until he had become thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the town, its people, and their ways. He had gambled on the green cloth and at the cock-pits, won money and lost, had several fights which proved the heavy hand he carried, and had drunk peace with his enemies over their cups of black coffee, and eaten their favorite "tamales" with them. Last of all, but not least, he had fallen in love with a beautiful black-eyed senorita, with rich, red lips and dusky black hair. Love of adventure alone had filled his life until he was caught in the web of fiery glances from the Spanish maiden's slumberous eyes. She lived away out on one of the crooked, narrow streets of the town, in an old two-story adobe with yellow-tiled roof and whitewashed walls. The fiery heart of the pomegranate bloomed in profusion against the walls, and a group of stunted palmetto trees gave shade over the old well at the back door, where, weekly, Norveta and her mother washed and dried their clothes.

It was here at the old well that Hackett had first seen her, with her brown, dimpled arms bared for the homely task over the tub; but forevermore that occupation was raised to the picturesque and beautiful for Hackett, for Love, with his golden wand, had lit the world with a

new and magical light for the bold and daring rover. He forgot how he had happened to come that way; he only knew that he had been taking a general survey of the town, out past the homes of the old grandees, where the sunlight glanced through the fantastically grilled iron gates and lit up the "patio," or inner courts, with their fountains and the cooling sound of dripping water, faintly imitating the grand and beautiful homes of far Seville and old Madrid. The morning was filled with sunlight, the song of birds, and the musical swish of the waters in the river.

Charmed with the scene that lay about him, Hackett had wandered on until he came to a place where the narrow, winding street led uphill. It was a back street, and turning first to right and then to left, he finally came to an old garden wall. Looking over the low stone wall, Hackett first viewed the yellow tiles of the roof, the vine-covered walls, the cool shade of the big trees and the women washing at the well. Feeling extremely thirsty from his long walk, he vaulted over the low stone fence and advanced toward the women beside the well. During the many months he had spent among the Portuguese and Spanish he had picked up an easy vocabulary of their native tongue, and it was in their own language that he addressed the women as he asked for a drink.

Hackett took the gourd the girl handed to him, dripping with the cool water from the dark depths of the well, but for the moment he left

its contents untouched as he gazed into the maiden's face, with its soft, sweet beauty. He leaned against the trunk of one of the old palmetto trees when he had slaked his thirst, and talked to them until it was no longer polite for him to tarry, then he bade them adieu and went his way; but he never forgot the place where Norveta lived, with its narrow, winding street leading up the hill, and he came again another day, and still another, to sit upon the old wooden bench beneath the pomegranates with her, and talk to her of love, the theme that never grows old. And Norveta—child of the sun-kissed prairies and burning southern skies—loved back with a fateful love that was deep, strong and powerful like the proverbial love of her warm-hearted race.

Her people had suffered much during the many uprisals in the town. Two brothers and her father had been massacred by the Royalists with other prisoners who had been captured during the last fighting, and only she and her mother, Senora Mendoza, lived at the old home now, once the scene of happiness and prosperity, but now accursed with the direst poverty. Their chief resource for their living was derived from the delicious "dulces" which the old senora made with her own hands for the sweet tooth of the fashionable and rich doñas of the town. A couple of little Mexican boys came each day to fetch the cakes, fresh from the oven, to the old senora's patrons. Besides the "dulces," Senora

Mendoza also twirled up extra dainty and choice "tamales," which were distributed by the little vendors at the different available points on the streets in the evening.

One day when Hackett had come and gone, and Norveta still sat where he had left her, on the old wooden bench beneath the pomegranates, the old Mexican woman looked askance at her from the corner of her eye.

"Jesu, Marie and Jose, what has come upon her?" Something whispered in her ear, "It is Love." The old grizzled head was lifted with the old-time haughty poise, and the weather-scarred face wore a sardonic smile as to herself she said, "Caramba! what have we to do with love? Better the desert eagle's cry and the bark of the wild dogs hunting for prey than the soft-footed enemy that makes us forget that there must come a day when we are to have our revenge!"

The old face gleamed with a diabolical light as she lifted a brown, shriveled hand and shook it menacingly toward the town below. "Ah! sweet will be that revenge when you, Salcedo, shall be pulled from your safe place and given to the dogs for carrion. May the souls in purgatory, that you have hurled to their untimely deaths, wail their curses upon you and yours forever!" She sat down upon her favorite seat beside the well, lit her old clay pipe and began to smoke, but in reality to dream of other days—days when she loved and was beloved, and her

home was the scene of happiness, ease and prosperity. She sat long, dreaming all the while of the glorious past, until the embers in her pipe died out, and the stem was tightly clenched between her worn, brown teeth; still they sat, both of them dreaming, until the night shades had fallen, and the soft southern moonlight filtered down through pomegranate and palmetto upon the drooping, dusky head of the senorita, and lit up with its soft beauty the weather-scarred and sorrowful face of the senora. Coming up from the gypsy camps on the river far below could be heard the sound of night revelries, the singing of wild border songs, and the twang of the guitar. Off toward the presidio the cavalry bugles were sounding "taps," and the river ran smooth beneath the tracings of the moonbeams that filtered down through the branches of the trees on the face of its waters below.

CHAPTER III

Stretching away to the westward and to the south from the fort were leagues upon leagues of open land, filled with great herds of wild horses and cattle, the free booty for whomsoever could take them. Countless buffalo, deer and antelope roamed the plains and furnished sport for the chase. It was a fair land of promise into which Hackett had ridden, first as an exploiting scheme, and later to take up his abode and make for himself a habitation in the midst of the vast stillness of the plains. In a beautiful valley near where the line of the old military road leading to Monterey afterwards ran, was the place chosen by our adventurous friend for his future home.

One hundred miles across country as the crow flies lay the sylvan spot Hackett had settled upon as the place where his ranchero should be. Hardly had he selected the future heath whereon he determined to plant his foot when the old bloody scenes on the streets of San Antonio were being re-enacted.

Delgado, a prominent leader of the Revolutionists, had been captured, and Salcedo, the Spanish governor, ordered him executed. The head of Delgado was stuck upon a pole in the central part of the town, and left there, a grue-

some object to look upon for days, as a threat to all dogs of the revolution. But twelve months later the war was in full blast that the execution of Delgado had started. At the terrible battle of the Rosello, a few miles outside the city, Governor Salcedo was defeated, with the loss of a thousand men. He was captured by Gutierrez, leader of the Mexican Revolutionists, and was butchered in cold blood, with fifteen other Spanish officers who had surrendered, in retaliation for the execution of Delgado. The town was now under the rule of the Revolutionists, and the old-time bitter feud of foe against foe was open and bleeding again. All members of the Royalist party had need to flee the city for the safety of their lives.

The home of the old Mexican woman, Emanuella Mendoza, had awakened from its long lethargy and was once more the scene of life and animation, for the Mexican and American forces, headed by Gutierrez and Colonel Perry, were garrisoned at the Plaza-de-las-Yslas. Her old heart ached when she saw the dark swarthy men coming home to their own again, and her sons and husband were no longer numbered among them. She had laid down all hopes in life, and wept and cried the day they were all three laid in their new graves, shot as traitors to the crown by the orders of Salcedo, the ravenous bloodhound who had held the old town by the throat for so long. Tears and grief will maim, but will not kill their victim, and so Emanuella

had lived on, but in her heart the graves of her beloved dead were never closed. She had stood with the crowd by the roadside along the way where Salcedo and his officers were taken out to be shot. In her black eyes there was no pity, and her large mouth was set and stern, for she recalled another day when her heart was crushed and her home laid waste by this same man. Again she lifted her old brown, toil-worn hand, and called upon Heaven to avenge her woes, and blessed God for removing from off the earth the fiend who had lit the holocaust that had wrecked her home and broken her heart.

"At last!" she cried, as she stood with her brown hand still uplifted, "the curse has fallen. There will be other graves to-night for the winds to moan over and the whippoorwills to sing their lonely songs for, and there will be hearts to ache and bleed in the home of Salcedo, as did old Emanuella's and little Norveta's on that bitter day so long ago!" and turning away from the jeering crowd she directed her footsteps homeward, looking lonely and isolated in her great grief as she made her way toward the house amid the big trees on the hill.

It was a picturesque old place, with its big trees, vines and flowering shrubs. The two great oaken entrance doors, thickly studded with large-headed iron nails, were portentous looking. Square red tiles were on the floor, and were fitted into the stairway leading to the two bedrooms above. The kitchen and living-room

were on the lower floor. A well-scrubbed square table, a wooden settee, and several low-seated chairs formed the furnishings of the living-room. Over the table hung two pictures of favorite saints, and upon the opposite wall hung a Spanish painting in brightly colored tones, representing the Alhambra.

The kitchen also had a tiled floor, and against one wall was a shelf holding large, semi-porous water jars. Upon the other wall and over a heavy stand was another long shelf, reaching the entire length of the kitchen. Bottles of every description, stone jars and yellow cooking crockery were grouped upon it. The hearth stretched across the farther end of the room, slightly raised under a projecting hood, and the smoke curled upward in long, lazy ribbons which had streaked the one-time white wall. Large iron ovens with tight-fitting lids stood upon the hearth. These were in daily use by the old senora when she was preparing her toothsome dulces for the market. Great strings of chilli peppers festooned one corner near the chimney hood, and hung in long loops from the black rafters; these also were used for market purposes in the flavor of her tamales and chilli-con-carne. Norveta either helped with the making of the dulces and tamales for the market, or took her time to herself, as the mood might please her. The old doña required no service from her to be able to earn their living, and all that she did was for love of her only child. Had

it not been for her one earthly treasure she would have had no incentive to work. When not helping her mother with the making of the tamales and cakes Norveta spent the time beneath the shade of the trees, reading from the story-books that had once been the pride and joy of her two brothers, Baptiste and Juan, whose untimely death had sent them to their early graves, martyrs upon the altar of their country's freedom. There were many of the books, and they were filled with tales of travel, of adventure by sea and land, of the Old World, with its kings and queens, and of Spain and the grandeur of her palaces and halls.

The girl was wholly artless in her love of books and of discussing them with the soldiers and officers of the Mexican troops who sometimes visited their home. Her father had been one of their leaders, and these books she loved so well—histories, biographies, and tales of travel in foreign lands—had been shipped to him regularly once a year, during the last years of his life, from Mexico City. Hackett often came and read with her as they sat beneath the shade of the trees, and he told her stories of his own making, of places he had been, countries he had seen, and much of the romance of his own native country—the story of his Scottish Queen, Mary Stuart, and how her favorite musician was cruelly murdered because it was said that he was in love with the Queen.

Hackett had made a good revolutionist in his

own country, and he was quick to lend his sympathies and fight for the cause of the Republicans. He had given good service with Colonel Perry's men in the downfall of the Royalist party, and stood ready at all times to serve the people he had come to love so deeply. He loved Norveta, and her people and their cause was his, and until peace reigned over the town, and the troops were strong enough, without the citizens, to hold the King's army at bay, he fought with them, using his strength, courage, and stratagem to aid them. Many times he went to the old house on the hill to keep watch that no harm should befall its inmates during the insurrection.

CHAPTER IV

The old Franciscan mission was looking calm and peaceful beneath the slanting rays of the setting sun. Within the church the priest was hearing confession, and the people on coming out went away singly and in groups. From among the grasses came the sonorous song of insect life, and the evening breeze, laden with sweet odors, was cool and refreshing. From a branch of one of the big live-oaks that gave shelter from the noontide sun could be heard the song of the mocking-bird, as it warbled its richest melodies, then the cacita's jarring, sonorous song held sway. There was a solemn stillness about the place, a peaceful quietude that vibrated with the faintest sound, save which all about the mission was quietness and repose.

A woman came out of the church and walked slowly away; she had but just left the confessional, and upon her young face still shone the light of sacred fires. As she walked she moved with that gliding, graceful motion peculiar to Spanish women of the higher class. She wore a dress of some sort of sheer, cool muslin, with large floral design, made with the pointed bodice and wide skirt peculiar to that age and time, and on her head she wore a black lace mantilla which fell in graceful folds about her shoulders.

The shadowy curtain of semi-twilight was slowly falling over the town as she turned away to the street leading from the mission to the resident portion of the town. Coming up from the presidio was the sound of an occasional stray note from a cavalry bugle. A whippoorwill flew past, the buzz of his long wings cutting the air with the sudden curvatures of his swift flight. She was walking with a quickened pace, when suddenly her progress was impeded by the appearance of a man who stepped from beneath the shadow of a live-oak tree and stood directly in her pathway.

"Doña Arguella should not be walking the streets unattended; it is not safe for you while your father's enemies hold the town," he said. There was a soft, gentle note in the man's voice, despite his keen anxiety for her safety.

"Axtel Xamino is no friend to the house of Arguella, then why should he concern himself about the daughter of Don Arguella?" replied the surprised woman, as she drew back from him with a haughty mien.

"Quien sabe, senorita! When the heart is hungry for the safety of its most deeply loved object it is an easy task for the feet to follow eagerly to the place where one's thoughts always lead."

"But your revolutionary dogs snarl and growl when they are held in leash, until their teeth are at the throat of the King's loyal subjects."

"Tsa! In these days when it is touch and go

for a man's life, and the cruelty of either side cannot excel that of the other, is it any time, doña, to turn a deaf ear to a friendly warning?" He had come closer to her, so close that he could catch the fresh, sweet odor of her garments.

"Lex-non-scripta rules the day, senorita; won't you be kind to Xamino? Just a word to warm his heart, so long has he waited for the sight of you or the touch of your hand."

She moved restlessly, melted from her cold mood by the vehemence of his ardent nature. He slipped his arm about her and his small brown hand sought hers. He drew her close under the shade of the aloes, and walked with her the rest of the way to her home, passionate words of love falling from his lips as they walked slowly along beneath the shade of the trees. The girl had sought by her very coldness to shield him from any harm that might befall him should he be caught in the company of a member of the family of old Don Arguella the Royalist. Neither would it be safe for her, had it been known to her father, that her love had already been given, and not to the handsome Spanish don he had chosen for her future husband. The home of the Arguellas had been left unmolested upon the downfall of the Royalists, much to the surprise of even the inmates themselves. Old Don Arguella had been driven with his men into the fastnesses of the mountains, and he knew not how it had fared with his loved ones at home. It was Axtel Xamino, the Mexican

spy, who finally succeeded in getting news to him, in his hiding place among the mountains, of the safety of his home and family. And it was Xamino who controlled the bloodhounds of Gutierrez and made them hold back the hand of destruction from the Arguella home. Xamino was held in high esteem among the Mexican military camps, for it had been conceded by the Mexican officers—who alone knew him as a spy—that no man could pass through the Spanish lines and accomplish such good for the struggling Republic as could the steely and withy Xamino. Carmen Arguella, alone of all the Royalists, knew him to be a spy for the Mexican army. His many humane acts in protecting the women and children and the old and enfeebled men of the town from the hand of vandalism when the Mexican troops held the presidio had made him a favorite in many homes of the wealthy Royalists.

Back from the main part of the town, on one of the quiet streets, stood the home of Don Antone Arguella—a large adobe, with flaring verandas with long fluted pillars reaching to the windows of the bedrooms above. Through the grillwork of the iron gateway you could see the tiny court within, filled with palms, plants, and vines that clambered about the tall white pillars. A thick growth of maple and oak shaded the spacious grounds, for this was the home of one of the richest Spanish dons of the town. One would have been charmed with the beauty

of the place, as through many carved stone doorways one caught sunny glimpses of the flowered courtyard, reminiscent of the sunny homes of Spain. It stood well out from the Plaza-de-las-Yslas, and was placed in the center of beautiful, natural grounds from whence one could catch a glimpse of the bosom of the river, which flowed on peacefully despite the terrific struggles witnessed by its namesake—the oft-beleaguered town.

When the master of the house was in favor with the ruling Governor, and his own party held the town, his home was often the scene of great social gaiety. Climbing up the tall white pillars of the veranda grew the Castilian rose, full fluted, and full of the sweetest fragrance. The arched doorway of stone gave entrance to a long sala, typical of that day. White walls covered with emblems of the Catholic faith, cool mattings, deep window seats, a wide hall with tiled flooring, and stiff, uncompromising horsehair furniture characterized the interior of the Arguella home; but to-day it is closed, the shutters are fastened and the curtains drawn, for the political enemy of the masters of the house holds the town.

Carmen Arguella had the ardent nature of the high-born Spanish women. Her mother was a Morraga—the best blood of old Spain—and her father had risen to his present position by the hand of the King, whom he had always defended and to whom he had ever been loyal. They were

of pure Spanish blood, and none of the blood of the Canary Islanders ran in their veins.

Though the war-dogs were loosed, yet life in the narrow, winding streets seemed much the same to the onlooker; cock-fights were the sport of the idle; and in the market place the peons offered their fruit and vegetables with a quiet indifference to everything save their sales. In the evenings there were places of amusement, and the fandango was danced by the swarthy men and the black-browed senoritas with as light a step as if there were no bitter feudal feeling running riot in the town. The dulces and wines were lavishly enjoyed, and the senoritas flirted with the officers from the presidio and laughed at them from behind their big fans as though they were far removed from all danger or peril. So long had the town been the scene of strife, turmoil, and bloodshed that the people had ceased to take the heaviness of it upon their hearts, save those who, like old Emanuella Mendoza, had lost all the light from their homes and hearts.

CHAPTER V

There was a road which ran out of the city to the west, the favorite highway of the people. Throngs of black-haired men, gay handkerchiefs tied about their heads and wearing flat-brimmed sombreros, mounted on their fiery mustangs and heavily armed, pass this way to-day. Following the Mexican troops come the American soldiers under the leadership of Colonel Perry. The man riding the spirited gelding in the outer file of soldiers, among the Americans, is our old friend, Theodore Hackett. His riata hangs idle by the gateway of his corral out at his cattle ranch, and the beeves are left to be looked after by his peons, while once again he puts forth his hand to help the struggling young republic. Among the women and children who have gathered along the way where the soldiers are passing is the strained and anxious face of Norveta Mendoza, watching for the one face that fills life, earth, and heaven for her. Carlos Decasto, the young Mexican who has loved her from the days of her infancy, flushed a dull red beneath his dark skin as he saw her among the watchers while the soldiers rode by, for he thought she had forgotten and forgiven their last quarrel and was there to look for him.

"Ah!" Her breath is drawn inward as she at

last catches sight of Hackett's fine face with its piercing gray eyes, shaded by the wide brim of his low, flat sombrero. His brown locks, worn long after the fashion of the day, were blown back from his face and neck by the lifting breeze. His muscular, well-knit form showed to good advantage in his doeskin doublet; his trunks of dark brown cloth passed over his knees and met the leathern gaiters that encased his lower limbs. He sat his saddle with that peculiar grace and ease seen only among the men of the plains. He lifted his hand to Norveta in mute farewell as he passed her, his face soft and radiant with the light of love, then digging the big rowel of his spurs into his horse's side, he moved on with the rank and file that was marching out in a vast body to the heights of Alazon, one mile west of the town, to meet the Spanish forces of fifteen hundred men gathered there under the leadership of General Elisondo to fight once again for the possession of the presidio and the coveted town.

It was on a June day, three years after the Republicans had taken the town, that this battle was fought. The contending forces met on the heights of Alazon, and the glittering uniforms of the Spanish officers looked picturesque in the bright light of the sun, as they and the soldiers under their command moved eagerly across the green, undulating prairie to meet their hated foe.

The officers of the Mexican troops and their

attendants wore uniforms, but the great mass of the Republican troops were dressed in their civilian clothes—the main consideration with them was their fighting capacity and how many of the hated King's subjects they could kill. They were fighting to free themselves, their homes and their children from the tyranny of the despotic rule of Spain. It was a desperate battle, each side fighting with dogged determination for the victory. The foremost ranks of each army melted away and others moved up to take their place. The terrific clash of the sabers could be heard far from the battlefield as the two armies closed in a hand-to-hand struggle. After a twenty-minutes engagement the Spanish lines began to weaken and give way. The Mexican troops saw their advantage and pressed them still harder. Colonel Perry rode down the lines on his black stallion, holding his saber aloft and cheering his men onward, who were already fighting like demons.

It was said, after the firing had ceased and the Spanish had been put to flight, that it was the fool-hardy Americans who rushed in and saved the day. Be that as it may, the Spanish forces had carried their great General—Elisando—seriously wounded from the field of battle; the Revolutionists still held the town, and were greeted with glad cries of welcome when they returned to their homes. But their joy was of short duration, for it was just two months later, fresh troops having been furnished the Royal-

ists, that the famous Spanish general, the Marquis of Arredondo, marched with a new army of two thousand soldiers to meet the Republicans commanded by Taledo and Perry, whose forces were not so strong. The two armies met near San Antonio, on the bank of the Medina River. After a furious contest the Republican forces were defeated with frightful carnage. Few men in the Mexican ranks escaped without receiving wounds, and most of them perished, their life-blood staining the waters of the Medina, on whose banks their bones were left to bleach through the passing of the ages.

General Arredondo immediately entered the city with his triumphant army and proceeded to make most cruel exactions and bloody reprisals upon the patriotic population. Private property was confiscated and taken for the crown in lieu of the expenses the King's army had incurred, in order to suppress the insurrection. All the male members of Delgado's family were condemned and shot for treason to the crown, not sparing even a boy of nine years. Six hundred prisoners were crowded into narrow and unwholesome prisons where many died through suffocation.

The home of our old friend Senora Mendoza was confiscated for the crown, and she and her daughter Norveta were imprisoned in the dreaded Quinta along with hundreds of other women of the best families, and compelled to grind corn for Arredondo's army. Though captive, yet the

old senora's fiery nature was not conquered, and her hate burned like a deep, smouldering fire. The younger women relieved the older ones of the hard work as much as they could. Norveta watched over her mother like a falcon watching over its brood. She never tired, lest if she fell asleep the dear old sorrow-scarred face might be gone when she awakened, for each day the old women who were too feeble to help grind the corn were taken out by the soldiers, and rumors had crept back into the Quinta that they were taken away and shot for abetting treason. This was the horror that kept Norveta's vigilance ever wakeful; and always she watched and hoped for some token from Hackett, but none came, for he had received a desperate wound in the last battle, and he, with two other wounded Mexican soldiers, was being cared for by the Mexican spy, Axtel Xamino, in an old dug-out near the banks of the river.

One day there came one of the handsome Spanish officers to the Quinta, "To look," he said, "at the pretty girls grinding corn for his army." He had passed from group to group, chatting merrily to them in his soft, musical tongue, giving an occasional playful stroke at the dusky red cheek of some pretty senorita, until at last he reached the place where Norveta and her mother were sitting upon the edge of one of the large stones used in grinding corn. The young officer paused, bending his graceful form clad in its gay uniform that he might the better

study the witching beauty of the dusky maiden. Norveta was tired and worn, but she smiled up at him through her long black silken lashes. There was a playful pout on her red curving lips as the bold officer's ardent gaze burned itself into her terrified soul. With a luring smile she lifted her arm to cover her face, as though playfully warding off the intense fervor of his gaze. He caught her arm and removed it that he might look into her eyes, while in softened tones he said: "Nay, senorita, do not hide your face from me; it is the most beautiful in the world. Don't you want to leave this dreadful place and come to live with me? I might learn to like you a great deal and take you to Spain with me when I return. Come, what do you say?"

The flush of shame dyed Norveta's cheek with a dull red glow. She looked at her mother, whose withered lips were parted with a snarl that showed her worn brown teeth, like an animal baring them for the attack. Norveta slyly pressed her foot against her mother's as a sign to be silent, while she turned her face, smiling upon the officer. He looked at the figure by her side as he questioned, "What is the old woman to you?" Norveta regarded him earnestly, as fear tugged at her heart, and replied, "She is my mother; we were living together, just she and I, when your army took the town, then our home was confiscated, and we were driven in here with the rest of them to grind corn for your army."

"If you will come, you may bring her with you. Is that not fair, little one?" he said, stroking her playfully under the chin. Norveta recoiled at his touch as though stung by the bite of a serpent. Still the officer persisted. "Come, and you shall go back to your home; this night shall you sleep under your own roof, and your home shall be restored to you if you will agree to all I ask of you and let me come to see you there."

"Now! To go out of this hated place, as you go, senor, and back to our home?"

"This very hour. I will conduct you myself. Come!" And he held out his hand for her and she followed, pulling at the old woman's skirts that she might come too.

And so Norveta and her mother passed out of the dreaded Quinta and entered into the free light of the day after a two-weeks imprisonment during the hot August weather. She had all of the Mexican's subtlety and elasticity of nature, and hoped that some opportunity might present itself for her to slay her unprincipled foe ere he succeeded in harming her, and it was this hope that had led her on to dare anything to secure their freedom, for she well knew her mother could endure only a few days more of imprisonment. Already she was gaunt and hollow-eyed and showed signs of exhaustion.

Out of the unbarred gate of the hated Quinta walked Norveta, her mother by her side and the Spanish officer just a little in advance of them,

and back to the old house on the hill, that had been suddenly vacated for its rightful owners. Neither of the women took any notice of their little household gods that had been destroyed during their absence, for things of far greater moment were facing them, which meant life or death. It was a situation in which all smaller things paled into insignificance. With trembling fingers and swift-moving feet Norveta moved about the rooms, gathering different articles into a small bundle. When she had finished, in company with her mother, she stole softly out of the back door, past the drunken sleeping guard, past the shade of the palmettos beside the well, and on through the old garden to the opening in the wall. The fer-de-lance could creep no more noiselessly than these two as they moved along like dim shadows under the aloes.

Down the hillside they crept, keeping always in the shadow and making their way toward the river. Once outside the city they moved more swiftly. Just for a moment did Norveta's splendid courage seem almost to forsake her, as she heard the far-off sound of the bugle call at the presidio sounding "taps," for it was at that exact hour that the Spanish officer was to come to the old house on the hill to see her, for she had promised him to be awaiting him then. She shook off the tremor of fear the moment it came, and pressed forward past the old scarred walls of the mission and on toward the river. At last

they came to a halt as they neared the mud hut of an old Indian living beside the river.

This Indian was of the San Jacinto tribe and had been a good friend to Jose Mendoza, the girl's father, in years gone by. Mendoza had saved his life once, and the old Indian trapper had never forgotten to find his way, with gifts of wild meats as his offerings of friendship, to his friends living in the old adobe among the big trees upon the hill. As soon as they reached the wigwam Norveta asked the aid of the old Indian to take her and her mother to some safe hiding place, where her enemy could not reach her, until she could hear from Hackett. The girl's heart told her that if he still lived she would receive word from him.

"Big Wolf no let fightin' man hurt white maiden; me take you and old squaw in canoe down river to safe place," said the old man.

The girl's heart leaped with joy at the prospect of deliverance from her threatened danger. She thanked Big Wolf in his own tongue, for she spoke the Indian's language with ease. She slipped a small crucifix into his hand, and with her little bundle of personal belongings for herself and her mother prepared to enter the canoe in which the Indian was to take them. Big Wolf kissed the little crucifix Norveta had given him and then secured it to the collar of elk's teeth he wore about his neck. He made the sign of the cross as he dropped upon one knee before the maiden, then rising, he moved rapidly to-

ward his canoe, followed by the two women, and soon the little craft was gliding swiftly down the river. It had been Norveta who had given Big Wolf his instructions in the catechism, and it had been Norveta who had walked with him to the old mission and stood as god-mother for him when the good padre had baptized him a Catholic and received him into the arms of the old Mother Church, and to Big Wolf the white maiden seemed a part of the "Great Spirit," and no man could harm her or her mother while they were under his care.

Hardly had Big Wolf's canoe shot up the river when another moved noiselessly to the brink, where but a few moments ago Big Wolf and his companions had stood. A small, lithe form sprang from the skiff, tethered it to the trunk of a tree, and went up the bank toward the old Indian's hut. Finding no sign or trace of its inhabitant the man came out, and presently the screech of a night owl echoed through the woods along the river. It fell upon Big Wolf's keenly trained ear as he was sweeping his oars through the waters of the river far above the old Indian's hut. He could not answer back lest he betray the women under his charge. He knew the call and who had given it; he also knew that they would look for the "sign" when no answer came to the call, and would find the rock turned down, which meant that the owner of the hut had gone in his canoe far up the river.

A half-strangled oath escaped from the man

when he found the hut vacated and the old Indian gone. It was Xamino, and he had work for the old Indian to do. Seeing the fruitlessness of waiting, Xamino sprang into his skiff as he shoved it out from the shore. He was overdue already at the old dug-out where Hackett, wounded and spent, lay waiting for him. His skiff swept the face of the waters, swift as the wing of a swallow. He had almost lost his life trying to make his way through the Spanish lines to secure medical aid for his wounded friend, and he decided to delay no longer, but hasten with the much-needed medicine back to the dug-out and see the old Indian at another time. He had inquired for Hackett's friends, the old senora and her daughter, and had learned that they were among the unfortunate women of the Quinta. He had heard nothing of their deliverance by the infatuated Spaniard, and had nothing cheerful to relate to his friend. This fact bore upon him, and fully absorbed with his own thoughts, he was sweeping past the old Indian trapper and his canoe when suddenly the dip of the Indian's oar fell upon his ear. Turning quickly around he spied the canoe as it was closely hugging the bank. His skiff was soon directed in the same direction, and as it neared the cover of the trees the screech of the night-owl once again rang out on the stillness of the night. This time it was answered by the distinct but low call of the whippoorwill. Instantly the canoe of the Mexican spy was alongside that of the

old Indian trapper. Big Wolf was terribly excited and began trying to tell Xamino, in the Indian tongue, who his passengers were, and of their escape from the Quinta. He sat more erect and took a firmer hold upon his oars as he realized anew the grave responsibility which rested upon him, emitting a series of grunts which he intended to give added strength to his words.

"Big Wolf honest Injun; friend old squaw and little maiden. Me take um,—me take up 'way; white man no fin' 'em!"

"Yes, I know you are a good Injun, Big Wolf, and you were a big brave to help these poor women in their great distress, but I know where their friend is, and he is wounded and not able to come for them. We must push on and find Pedro, the old Mexican who lives across the river from the ferry. We can get a couple of burros from him for the women to ride, we leave our boats in his care, and make our way to the Medina. We can go by the old Indian trail, to protect the senorita and her mother from anyone that might be on the lookout for them along the main road.

The Mexican had explained his plans to Big Wolf in a mixed jargon of Indian and Mexican, but it had all been intelligible to the two women who sat silent in the boat, listening. Norveta's heart kept singing its song in the darkness, while the Mexican and Indian were laying plans for their escape. "I knew it! I knew if he lived I would find him!" Aloud, she said: "Senor, we

will go with you, and Big Wolf will do as you say, but let us not tarry here so long." She spoke to the Indian in his own language and made known to him her wish to go in search of her wounded friend. Peaceably and quietly Big Wolf turned his boat and followed that of the Mexican's. If it was all right with the white maiden and she was willing to go, Big Wolf was willing too, giving his sanction in a series of unintelligible grunts.

The strong brown arms of the Indian plied his oars with a sweeping stroke that carried his canoe swiftly over the water, closely followed by that of the Mexican. It was near midnight when the two boats drifted along under the shadow of the cypress trees by the water's edge, and again the cry of the night-owl was heard. Soon the call was answered by the appearance of a shadow creeping along the river bank. It was Pedro, an old Mexican.

"Hist!" cried Xamino, "we are refugees from San Antonio, the Quinta, and Aradondo's blood-letting dogs. We must have mules to carry the women to a safe hiding-place before the sun rises." He had pulled his boat close alongside the bank, and spoke in guarded tones to the old Mexican, who bent low to catch his every word, his fingers tightly grasping a huge grapevine which grew about the trees that shadowed their trysting place.

"Is it Xamino, the Mexican spy, who comes for aid?" asked the old man.

"It is Xamino and his Indian guide, Big Wolf, who are taking these women to a safe place where they can escape Aradondo and his butchers. Since the fall of the republic at the battle of the Medina, they have been prisoners in the Quinta with the other women who are made to grind corn for Aradondo, his officers and his army. By the Madonna's help the senorita escaped, bringing her mother with her, and we must not let them be recaptured. The blood of a Mendoza should be sacred to those who love and fight for the republic."

"Tsa! Baptiste Mendoza, his father and brother—how well I remember the three of them, all laid in their graves in one day. May their blood be on the head of every Spanish dog whose footsteps lead their hungry, wolfish horde upon the sacred soil of the old town. All I have is yours, and command old Pedro, if in any way he can help the cause of the Revolution or befriend one in whose veins runs the blood of a Mendoza!"

The old man moved back a pace as he ceased speaking, and stood with bowed head as the two women passed before him, each one resting her hand lightly upon the old, bowed, grizzled head, as in low tones they murmured, "May God's greatest blessing rest upon you and yours!" The old man blessed himself before he raised his head, and his heart was filled with emotion—a feeling as though something sacred had passed by.

Out into the night, under the star-studded sky, moved the little train—two little burros bearing upon their backs the homeless, persecuted, and fleeing women, while in advance walked the Big Wolf and Xamino. No wild animal of the forest ever had ears more keenly attuned for the faintest sound than did the stalwart Indian who led the way for the little band, moving cautiously over the wide prairie.

Keen as was the outlook kept by the Indian, it was Xamino who was the first to detect by the sky-line several forms moving in the same direction as that taken by their own little party. With the swift movements of men accustomed to the perils of the plains, Big Wolf and the spy led their charges to cover in a low, thick growth of chaparral bushes, screening themselves also, while they watched the movements of the travelers, who seemed to be coming closer and closer.

With bated breath the watchers behind the chaparral bush waited to see if it were friends or foes who were approaching.

The travelers neared their hiding place and passed slowly on without a pause. The keen ears of the Indian and the spy caught fragments of speech as they passed that proved to them that the moving figures were other refugees fleeing from the wrath of Aradondo, while their hearts were still with bleeding, beloved old San Antonio.

When the travelers had passed on for some distance Xamino with his little party continued

their journey. Meeting with no more hindrances they arrived at their destination on the banks of the Medina in the gray of the early morning. The old senora was greatly exhausted from her night's travel and her many days of privation while a prisoner in the Quinta. Blankets were spread in one corner of the dug-out, and here she found a comfortable bed upon which to rest her worn and weary body. Norveta had arrived at their destination vigorous and beautiful, refreshed and delighted with the hope of once again seeing her well-beloved friend. Hackett had sat all night by the door, just outside the dug-out, waiting for something the nature of which he could not define. His wound pained him, and the fever ran riot in his veins, but his intellect was keenly attuned as one will sometimes feel when about to experience some great event, be it for good or evil. Across his lap lay his rifle; and more than once through the night his lips had babbled of his boyhood days, of Scotland, her hills, the bloom of her heather, and her rocks and rills.

It was thus that his friends found him in the early dawn as he sat by the open door of the old dug-out, his eyes bright and star-like as he looked at them as they approached, but seeing them only as objects far back in the past. In his fevered frenzy he mistook Norveta for Mary Queen of Scots.

"Behold! Here comes the beautiful Scottish Queen!" he cried. "Now, let Hackett be be-

headed and all will go well, or by the powers that be old Scotia will never bend her knee before a tyrant's throne!" And with a painful effort he sought to reach for an imagined saber as he rose to his feet, while his rifle lay unnoticed upon the ground where it had fallen.

Norveta's heart was filled with foreboding as she noticed the flash of delirium in the fine eyes she had always loved so well. Xamino was by his side instantly, and with soothing touch and gentle words he soon administered a heavy narcotic which locked the tired, overworked brain in a deep, dreamless sleep. Big Wolf had watched the sufferer until his eyes closed in sleep, and then he turned away toward the woods where he searched for hours for a certain herb, known and used among his people. He found and brought back with him the coveted weed. From this he made a strong tea, and when Hackett roused up out of his sleep the Indian gave it to him to drink. All through the day and into the night they still gave him the tea made from the herb, and when the morning light broke through the interstices of the trees about the door of the dug-out on the second day after their finding him delirious, his friends rejoiced to see the fever broken. Norveta made soups, nutritious and health-giving, from the wild game the men brought in from the hunt; she broiled venison to a tender, juicy brown and brought it to him to eat; and from her small stores she conjured her brain to create for him

such food as would bring back his once splendid physical strength. When a bowl of soup, porridge, or any toothsome dish was prepared for Hackett, the same was also prepared for her mother. The old senora soon gained renewed strength after a few days' rest, but it was a serious wound that had laid the hardy Scotchman low, and it was some time before he was able to travel. His wound had suffered for lack of proper attention during the first days, which had caused the terrible fever that had left him weak and spent.

One day, when he was feeling much improved, he looked up into Norveta's face as she was bending over him, coaxing him to take a morsel of food she had prepared for him, and said to her, with a smile on his face: "It is worth the fall of the republic, and all I have suffered from that poisoned bullet of the Spanish dogs, to be able to lie here and have your little hands minister to my aches and pains. I think I shall procrastinate a little longer. I hardly think I desire to get well all at once."

The girl's face flushed deeply and her dark eyes shone with a bright light; her soul was happy, for she knew that his bantering tone meant that he would soon be able to travel. He reached forth his hands and took her face between his palms, and there was a husky note in his voice as he whispered softly, "You will come with me, won't you, Norveta, and be my little wife, out there on the beautiful prairies where a world of

flowers turn their sweet faces at early morn to greet the sunrise? And the senora, she will come too, won't she, to keep my little wife from growing lonely when her husband is away, in search of his cattle? Will you come, Norveta?" he asked again in soft, pleading tones.

Norveta's dark head bent low, and her red lips pressed a kiss upon his, and this was their betrothal. With all the ingenuity their fertile brains could command, Xamino and Big Wolf finally succeeded in bringing a priest who joined them in the holy bonds of marriage, after which they started for their new home, far to the westward, beyond the reach of the tumult in the town.

CHAPTER VI

While Norveta and her mother were making good their escape, the Spanish officer, Antone Cortez, had left the barracks, humming low to himself a soft love-tune, well pleased with the exquisite curl of his black mustachios, and the neat fit of his gay, elaborate uniform. The slumbering soul in Norveta's splendid large eyes, drooping beneath their jetty fringe, had awakened all the vehemence of his passionate nature, and it was with a light and buoyant step and a throbbing heart that he went to meet her.

The old heavy, nail-studded door swung upon its hinges, unlatched, and the guards he had placed to watch the movements of his victim dozed beneath the palms in a drunken slumber. When the full truth dawned upon him his wrath was suffocating. Like a hissing viper he sprang at the guards, the steel blade of his saber gleaming in the moonlight.

"Caramba!" he hissed, his lips writhing with hate as he dealt a death-dealing blow, almost severing the head of one of the guards whose chin rested upon his breast while he slept; the other he pinioned with his slender blade, twisting it in the wound as he watched his victim writhe. At last, when there was no longer a living being on which to vent his wrath, he slunk

away, hacking at the senseless shrubs and trees in his demoniacal fury, his late love for the beautiful Norveta turned into the bitterest and most cruel hate. In his heart he swore that the bitter fate of the outcast should be hers should he find her, and the old hag should be shot for a traitor to the crown; but he wot not of the mountains he would have to climb before he could fulfill his dire threat.

The two guards were reported to General Aradondo as being shot while found asleep when they were on duty guarding a couple of prisoners belonging to the revolutionists. The following day Norveta's old home, which had sheltered her from infancy, was razed to the ground, the shrubbery and trees hacked and ruined, and everything about the place laid waste; but Norveta and her mother were safe at the old dug-out, guarded by Xamino and Big Wolf.

Defeated in his diabolical plans for revenge, Cortez became a roaming demon, delighting in the most cruel punishment that could be inflicted upon any one who adhered to the cause of the revolution. Gradually there arose out of these conditions a regular guerilla warfare which threatened the ruin of the town. Only a few were left prospering, and these were the wealthiest Spanish families belonging to the Royalist party, among them old Don Arguella, who had long since returned to his own. To him the Governor was the King, as his representative,

and Don Arguella knew naught but loyalty to his sovereign.

When General Aradondo, of the Spanish army, suppressed the revolution, and the old town passed once again into the hands of the Royalists, the wide, roomy house of Arguella was restored to something of its old-time grandeur. It was the favorite loitering place of the officers from the presidio, and Antone Cortez was the one of the gaily uniformed militants who disported himself in the flowery court, wide rooms, lofty corridors and halls of the Arguella home more often than any of his fellow-officers. Others would come and go, but Antone stayed, and played a graceful love drama with the senorita, Carmen, with the scarlet lips and the dark velvety eyes, whose heart and love were held tightly in the grasp of Axtel Xamino's small brown hand. She bore the honors of her father's house with regal mien, and Antone's friends from the barracks found her a delightful hostess; but she had no love to bestow upon any of them. There was a restless fear that haunted her that at any time Xamino might be captured while trying to make his way through the Spanish lines to see her. One thing that pleased her and often eased the nervous strain, was the fact that her father was a strong friend to Xamino, and on this rested her one strong hope, that should he be captured while making some of his dare-devil runs, she felt sure her father would protect him and do all he could to save his life—

for had not Xamino been a friend to him when fasting in the mountains? The good padre at the mission knew of their love, but he was good and true, and Carmen knew that the messages Xamino left with him for her would be kept safe until they were delivered into her own hands.

Restless and ill at ease she wandered forth one bright sunny morning from the court into the wide grounds, densely shaded by large forest trees, that she might be alone and enjoy half an hour of solitude. She had just reached the little foot-bridge crossing the river running through the grounds, when she saw Antone Cortez approaching from the opposite end of the bridge. A slight look of displeasure clouded Carmen's face at his intrusion, which did not escape the keen critical eye of Antone, but with that subtle and pleasant deference which characterized him, he approached her and with a pleasant greeting fell into step beside her.

Carmen covered her displeasure with affable mien, for her keen woman's intuition prompted her to be wary with this wickedly handsome senor, as though managing the antics of a leopard or tiger.

He was a fine specimen of the young Spanish grandee, dark and dashing and reckless, lithe of figure, thoroughbred, dissipated, and ardent. He wore the half-dress uniform of the Spanish military, and his peaked straw hat was gaily decorated with cords of gold, the tassels hanging low upon the wide brim; his deerskin boots

were showily embroidered and bristled with immense silver spurs which gave forth a metallic click as he walked. They had passed beyond the bridge when they saw the good padre from the mission coming toward them. Carmen's heart gave a quick throb and the color flamed on her cheek. "Could he have a message for her?" was her mental query; but he greeted them and passed quietly on toward the house.

"Why does Doña Arguella blush so deeply at the sight of the good padre?" asked Antone. "Is it the sin of another broken heart that presses guiltily upon her fair young soul? The good padre will grant absolution to the senorita for all broken hearts. It is the senors, wicked senors, from whom he withholds his pardon and absolution." His voice was soft and musical, and there was a half-questioning cadence in the utterance of his words. He turned and looked for a moment after the bent form of the venerable old priest, and then again he said, a quizzical smile resting upon his wickedly handsome face, "How homely the padre looks in that old brown robe he wears. He could never win a smile from the plainest senorita in all de Bajar!" The gleam of his white teeth showed through his lips, now parted in a smile of half sarcasm.

"Jesu, Madre, and Josef!" exclaimed the senorita as she blessed herself, "how you talk, senor. It is wicked to speak so of the good padre who cares for nothing but the saving of

souls!" and she drew further away from him as she hurried on.

He gave a low, musical laugh as he kept pace by her side. "Nay, senorita, my ridiculing that old ugly brown robe he wears can not hurt him. The good padre is faithful to his souls in purgatory, and also here upon earth; but know you not, Doña, that he has loved some one some time, somewhere. If he has not, then he has missed sipping the sweetest wine all the ripe grapes of Andalusia could give!"

They were walking toward her home, for Carmen felt that news awaited her there from the good father's hands. As Antone passed with her beneath a huge live-oak tree he bent swiftly forward and quickly pressed a kiss upon her red curving lips. She thrust him from her, a flush of indignation lighting her face, her words sharp and cutting. "It would be well for you, Antone Cortez, if you visited the padre and his confessional more often. Who knows but that he could tell you where rest the souls of the two guards who were killed while asleep, out on Mendoza Hill, when they were guarding a young girl and an old woman. The sight of it, as the murderer twisted his saber in the heart of his writhing victim, has crazed the brain of the little Mexican boy who crouched in the shadow of the shrubs but a few feet from the old well. He had come to see the last leave-taking of the two women he had served as tamale market boy for so long, and while he watched and waited for some sign of the

two women he had heard had been liberated from the Quinta, he saw a fine officer from the barracks and not his old loved friends. The Mexican boy was a witness of what was done that night, and in his desperation he sought relief in the confessional. He begs me to find Norveta and her mother, but the Spanish officer who murdered the guards holds the secret of their disappearance."

"The priest shall die!" Antone exclaimed. "He knows too much; and you?" There was a sinister gleam on his face, and a dull red shone beneath the olive of his skin, and there was insolent defiance in the backward toss of his head.

"Tsa! Idle is your threat, and useless would be the killing of the old priest, for your general and the governor abet all that their officers may do. As for me, I do not fear you nor do I fear legions like you. No brave and noble Spaniard would murder defenseless men in their sleep." Turning as she spoke, she left him and entered the house.

Antone stood still for a moment after she had left him, his face dark with anger, and his soul chagrined at his defeat. Sullen with ominous anger, yet baffled, he turned away from the Arguella grounds and walked toward the presidio. As he picked his way along, his dark and baleful soul was comforted by the devastation of homes by the way. Over there was the demolished home of a hated revolutionist, nearer was another, and farther on still another. The inhabitants of

these homes had been swallowed up by the terrible reverse that had placed the Royalists back in power. Down at the presidio the scene was quite different; here all was gaiety, life, and movement. Antone Cortez solaced himself with deep draughts of wine and the excitement of the card table until far past midnight. Between the deals in the play his mind ran dark and turbulent, hardly coming back to the play when he resumed his cards. He played with a restless hand, and his thoughts were often with the priest out at the mission. He hated him and his confessional, for there his secret had been given into his keeping. The boy had rushed into Carmen's presence, wild-eyed and terror-stricken, within an hour after the murder of the guards, and told her of the double tragedy; but it was not against Doña Arguella that Antone Cortez's fiercest anger burned; the full of that was given to the priest who, under the sacred bonds of the confessional, had heard the story of his crime.

Aradondo needed all his men at the barracks to hold the old town in subjection, and he would ill brook the ruthless slaughter of his soldiers; indeed, it was only for some important duty neglected, or for treason to the crown, that he suffered the life of one of his soldiers to be sacrificed. This was well known to Captain Cortez, and the day following his crime he had prepared his report, and backing it up with the three Mendoza men who had been shot for traitors, he had succeeded in covering his real movements

and in securing orders for the Mendoza home to be razed to the ground and its groves to be utterly destroyed. Nevertheless, Captain Cortez knew that, should the real truth be known to his general, court-martial and severe punishment awaited him. He knew the sanctity of the confessional, and that rather than betray the confession of any member of his flock a priest would sacrifice his own life. All this was familiar to him, he knew that it had been so from the first foundation of the Mother Church, but he gave it little credence, for his own heart was too full of craft and treachery to conceive of an idea of such magnitude and of a trust remaining inviolate and unbroken.

"Silence the tongue of those who hold your secrets and then alone are they safe from the ears of others!" was his inward thought; and as he sits at the card table tonight, he is thinking of the best and safest way to dispose of the priest, for it was not Carmen or the tamale boy he feared so much as he did the priest. Should Aradondo get wind of the truth and question the priest, he did not doubt that the truth would be divulged, and this he was determined should never occur. Rather than meet the anger of Aradondo and suffer the indignities of a court-martial, he would dispose of a dozen priests. "The Church can well spare a few," he told himself, when he fully made up his mind to do the deed.

In his persecution of Norveta Mendoza and

her mother he reckoned not that such influential friends as the Arguellas would rise up to speak in their behalf. Carmen and her father had been working for their liberation from the Quinta, but even the old Don, with all of his prestige and influence, had need to be chary with his investigations in behalf of a revolutionist.

Mightier forces than all others yet were to confront Antone Cortez when the time for retribution came. Axtel Xamino and he loved the same woman; the Mexican's love was true and long-suffering, while that of the Spanish officer was selfish, and he sought self-aggrandizement by marriage into a noble family. Though ever alert and watchful for some trace of Norveta, he was pressing his suit for marriage with Carmen. This plan now had come to naught, for his suit at the Arguella home he knew would not be so successful in the future as it had been in the past. He staggered away from the card table in the early morning hours, and reaching his private quarters threw himself undressed across his bed, and was soon breathing heavily in a deep, drunken sleep.

Carmen Arguella was right in her surmise that the priest had a message for her. She left her father and the good padre talking together on the veranda, while she sought the sanctity of her own room and closed the door before breaking the seal of her letter. She read Xamino's passionate love words with rosy cheeks and starry eyes whose light answered back the story

of true love. In an ecstasy of delight she pressed to her lips the paper his hands had touched, so great was her happiness at knowing he was safe and that no harm had befallen him. On a dainty piece of parchment she wrote back to him the story of her undying love and her great joy at the receipt of his letter and to know that he was alive and had received no injury, then laying aside the quill she locked her hands and let them lie in her lap while she sat and dreamed, as have so many women when receiving the first letter from the man they love.

Love letters, or "billet-doux," as they were then called, were not nearly so frequent in Carmen's day as now. A letter of any description was rare, and it was considered one of the finer accomplishments to be able to "script" a letter. Carmen was past mistress of the art, and from her box of bright new quills she had chosen the best to write her letter, and now she takes it up with the touch of reverence, as though it was something sacred, and putting it safely away she tells herself it shall be a sacred treasure and used no more—its mission had been fulfilled.

She succeeded in passing the letter to the good padre unnoticed, as he was leaving, and the bright, happy light in her young face repaid him for all the risks he had taken. He delivered the reply to the old fruit vendor who came that evening to the confessional, but the eyes of the penitent kneeling there were filled with the light

of a human love as they fell upon the letter, which he eagerly pressed to his lips.

"Be mindful of your Creator, my son, and not too much given to the vanities of this life!" spoke the voice beyond the lattice. A humble head was bent low as softly the words were spoken.

"Bless me, father, for I have sinned—may Almighty God and you, father, forgive me!"

Again the murmured words from beyond the lattice reached him as he received his penance and absolution; then the bent form of the old fruit seller came forth from the confessional, and stooping beside the door at the entrance he lifted his fruit baskets and went limping away toward the road that led to the river. Once by the river's edge, the baskets were poked into their hiding place, together with the old fragments of clothes that had served to make up an impenetrable disguise. The bent figure sprang erect like a young pine tree, and the nude form of Axtel Xamino sprang into the river and swam slowly away.

Far below the town he came out on the opposite shore, and pulling himself up on the bank he lay for a while resting from the long swim he had taken. The balmy odors of the soft southern night soothed him, and once he was rested from the late exertion, he felt refreshed. Rising, he went to a near-by thicket, where he found the clothes he had left there when starting on his way to town. Directly he was dressed he made

for the hacienda of old Pedro, which was near by, and taking his horse from the corral he saddled and mounted him, and then taking leave of old Pedro rode away toward the Medina to find his friends who were waiting his coming, that they might be starting on their journey to the hacienda that was to be the future home of Hackett and his young bride.

CHAPTER VII

After seeing his friends safely conducted to their future home, far from the dangers of the beleaguered town, Axtel Xamino mounted his mustang and rode north until he struck the overland trail, or trading-road, leading across country from Natchitoches to Monterey. He still wore the disguise he had adopted from the first, that of the common "greaser," which he wore when eluding recognition by those high in authority, who knew him as Xamino, envoy to the Governors of the States of Coahuila and Texas, sent thither by the Viceroy of Mexico. He had worn this disguise when fighting with the rebels at the terrible slaughter on the banks of the Medina, and no one guessed that the slender brown hand, wielding his saber so dexterously, was the hand of an aristocrat, whose blood had come from the regal halls of Chapultepec.

Hackett had guessed that he was other than an upper-caste Mexican, but Xamino was silent on the subject of his origin even with him, and Hackett respected this silence. The coarse disguise and the assumed name of Carlos Lopez, worn by the "greaser," could not hide the symmetrical lines of the born aristocrat from the widely trained and keenly observant eye of Hackett, even as Xamino felt that Hackett him-

self hailed from other ranks than that of the common herdsman. This mystified feeling had given place to a strong friendship, as the two men recognized in each other that latent, lion-like courage that lifts man, in strenuous times of peril, above the common clay. Each knew instinctively, as such men do, that the other was to be thoroughly trusted in all things. And because of this sentiment throbbing in his heart Xamino had kept faithful watch over his friend from the time he received his dreadful wound on the battlefield until he had thoroughly recovered, and was safe back on his well-loved plains, with his true love by his side, joined together in the holy bonds of wedlock.

San Antonio lay conquered and inactive for the time, the still quietness of desolation filling her streets. The fierceness of the fighting now raged beyond the Grande-del-norte River, and thither Xamino was making his way. Leaving Hackett's ranch, to the west of the town, just at sunrise, he rode in a northwesterly direction from San Antonio all day, and the day following struck the main trail, or Monterey road, just where it enters the Guadalupe Plains, which are virtually the foot of the "Estacado" or Staked Plains, that strange expanse of arid desolation, coming down from the north. The Guadalupe Mountains, with bold, brown outlines, keep eternal watch over the far-stretching plains. These strayed children of the Sierra Madres, rugged and water-worn, wind-carved and eroded, boul-

der-tossed and desiccated, look out on a region of savage desolation almost beyond conception. The heat is something fearful. The heated atmosphere is so clear that it makes the white alkaline efflorescence gleam for scores of miles in every direction. It is a luminous desolation, the sand grains are transparent and translucent in the sun's fervid glow, and queer sorts of illusions appear as the traveler nears the rude and eroded foot-hills.

Every summit and mountain side is aquiver in the magical light. Rocks gleam and burn as with multi-hued flames from a refiner's furnace. Bald and forbidding, bare of timber in many reaches, they yet carry at their base a stretch of some fifty miles or more of sand and gravel where grow the cacti—hideous hobgoblins of the world of vegetation. The plump arrowweed and the mesquite tree, with its pale leaves and gnarled, low-spreading branches, also grow in this region of desolation. An occasional arroyo, or shallow lagoon, desiccated beneath the hot rays of the late summer's sun, may be seen as the eye of the traveler scans the horizon. The second day brought our friend to the main trail, where he soon fell in with a caravan of pack-mules, laden with goods and bound for Monterey. The mules were heavily laden and nearly worn out with travel, yet they proceeded with perfect regularity in a single line, regardless of the lack of bridle or halter. The owners of the caravan followed in the rear; they rode their

mustangs, with their enormous spurs with rowels an inch and a half in length, and lever bits of the harshest description which, with but very gentle pressure, were able to break the jaws of their animals. Hundreds of small bells dangled from the necks and limbs of the little pack-mules and emitted a tinkling sound as the caravan proceeded on its way.

Xamino wrapped himself in his zarape at night-fall and slept his weariness away, and morning found him fresh and ready for the day's travel. He had been this way before and knew just how to divide the time that it would take him to pass beyond the plains. At last he saw far in the distance the broken, rugged lines of the mountains. The wonderful clearness of the atmosphere made the gigantic rocks and peaks shimmer and tremble in the hot haze of the noon-day sun. He had begun to tire of the slow progress of the caravan, and once the foot-hills were reached he decided to travel the rest of the distance to Monterey alone. They were drifting southward now, and the gulf breeze would moderate the intense heat, when once they had left behind the arid plains, where the desert willow, with its feathery tremble, vibrates in the heat, and where the stately yucca, the "barrel" cactus, and the Spanish bayonet are met with not infrequently. The landscape glows with the rose flush of early morn, deepens into a sere brown and gray, and blends from that into a marvelous purple as the afternoon shadows de-

scend. These rich tones soften every rude outline and transform every rugged arroyo into a darkling translucence of color that transcends the richest dyes of the Orient, far surpassing the soberness of imperial robings. Sunset makes the golden glory majestic with the many changes that radiation can produce. All colors appear; rose and pink, gold and amber, aquamarine and apple bloom, the flush of the sea-shell with the gray of the night, the scarlet of the poppy with the crimson brown of the fading day, turquoise and emerald mingle their softness with the flame of the ruby, and over all arches an azure dome uncheckered by cloud of any kind, dimmed only by a golden mirage of sun-gilded towers, spires, turrets, and plumed trees—"castles in Spain."

With a native power of endurance, born in him with his aboriginal blood, Xamino rode day after day without tiring. His mustang, with mettle of steel, lank from hard riding, and his flanks foam-flecked, carried him across the Mexican border. Here you became sensible of a change of environment, although the sand-hills, the sage brush, the mesquite and cacti remain the same as in Southwest Texas. Horse and rider crossed the hot sands and rested beside the cool streams in the green valleys. The man ate his dried beef, rolled the dough of his bread on the leathern tache from the wattle of his saddle, and, twisting it around a stick, roasted it over his camp-fire. He knew where to find the good watering places and the choice bits of

grazing for his horse. Three days after leaving the caravan he rode into Monterey. Skirting the outer edge of the city, he made his way to one of the Mexican hovels in the outskirts. He drew rein at the doorway, and springing from his saddle threw the bridle reins to a brown-skinned lad who lounged by the gateway, squinting at the blazing sunshine with beady black eyes that looked out from beneath the torn brim of an old hat of plaited straw. Entering the doorway he met at the threshold an aged Mexican woman with grizzled hair. Her person was clothed in worn garments that yet showed the flame of the bright colors so much favored by the native Mexican. Xamino lifted his sombrero with a native chivalry, but his eyes were fastened upon an old time-worn bureau of fifteenth century make, which stood against the opposite wall.

"Senora?" was the only word that fell from his lips, but his eyes made plain to her understanding what he dared not speak. The grizzled head bowed, and a reverence for her visitor showed in the softening of the time-worn, toil-scarred face. "Senor, they are there!" she said, as she pointed toward the wall where the old bureau stood.

With quick, agile steps the man reached the old bureau, and shoving it aside pressed his shoulder hard against the wall, a section of which gave way and through the opening showed an entrance between double walls into a

passage leading down into an underground lead-way. Xamino entered the opening, the old woman closed the aperture and rolled the old bureau back to its place; then, stooping, she stretched forth her hand and removed all sign of the marks on the sanded floor whence the old box had been moved. Xamino followed the passage to the underground lead-way, and then to his left about fifty or a hundred yards, and came to a large, cavern-like room. From a pole which stood in the center of the cavern swung an iron frame with sockets which held some half dozen tallow candles, one of which was now burning, shedding its yellow light upon the darkness of the room and dimly outlining the surroundings. All about, in regular file and form, stood piles of firearms; kegs of powder and ammunition filled every available place; and stacks of swords, sheathed and unsheathed, added their bulk to the great mass of material for defense which the Revolutionists were gradually storing for future use.

Xamino remained in this underground abode for upwards of two hours. Some half dozen swarthy-faced, dark-bearded men gathered eagerly around him as he appeared before them. He met their glad greetings with a hearty handshake, and what passed between the spectacular group was only for the ears of the prime leaders

of the Mexican Revolution, whose smouldering fires were now gathering renewed strength. The strong, muscular frame of a powerfully built man stood in the center of the group, and to him Xamino directed most of his words. A crucifix and beads worn about his neck showed the religion before which he bowed; and in the smooth-shaven face the glow of intellect and noble manhood shone, imparting to all who came under the spell of his magical voice a deep conviction of the man's exalted nature and high spirituality. He was a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, who, like many of his brotherhood, wanted to see his people freed from the oppressive yoke that was galling them. The men about him were the pick of the Revolutionists, such as Jurez, Guerrero, and other officers. They hung upon the priest's admonition to let the fires for the love of freedom burn upon the altars of their hearts, and as he and his brotherhood were giving their lives without reckoning for the enlightenment and uplifting of humanity, so they too should give in just such measure their strength, courage, and life if need be, that their future descendants should live free, intelligent lives, worshiping their Creator, not with slavish fear and dread, but with an exalted adoration that could only come to the people who worshiped with that magical love that casteth out all fear.

Late in the night, when the soiled garments of the "greaser" were left in the cavern, and a fashionably dressed young Mexican of the highest caste stepped out of the cactus grove at the base of a knoll below the walls of the town, Carlos Lopez for the time was dead to the world, and Axtel Xamino, the Viceroy's handsome plenipotentiary, appeared in his stead.

CHAPTER VIII

It is a far cry from the smooth-tongued envoy, the versatile diplomat, to the soddened road traveled by the clod of common clay, but in the active brain of Xamino there were resources adequate to even greater demands than the traversing of this distance would require. His heart was with the Republicans, while by birth his lot had been cast among their enemies. He had inherited from his father a strain of aboriginal blood through his grandmother, a Mextica Indian, whose home had been in the city of Oaxaca, in the south of Mexico. His mother was a daughter of the Castle of Chapultepec, and in her veins flowed royal blood. Hers was a woman's life given all for love, and a secret marriage brought its fulfillment.

When it was known by the royal family that the daughter of their house had mated with one beneath her, with one in whose veins flowed aboriginal blood, the young lover-husband was assassinated, and the old friar who had secretly united them was banished to a monastery. The young, imprudent mother was kept a captive in one of the upper rooms of the castle, and when her child was born death released her from the leaden grayness of her life stretching so far before her, leaving her baby as a legacy to keep

alive her memory and the outrage inflicted upon her young wifehood and motherhood.

The babe had thrived; and as it gradually grew into a spirited boy with black locks and soft dark eyes, the hardness in the father's heart died out, and in its place awakened an indulgent and absorbing love. He had looked well to the training and education of the lad and had prepared for his future. In a fit of remorse he had told the lad, when he had reached manhood, the story of his father and mother, withholding nothing—a sort of reparation, as it were, to his daughter, hoping thereby for pardon for the great wrong he had done her.

From the day Axtel learned the truth he conceived a bitter hatred for the aristocracy. He brooded over the cruelty until he longed to be able to turn the treachery that had been used against his father upon his destroyers. He would employ the same treachery that had been used to destroy his young mother and had assassinated his young father, taking their youth and all gladness from their lives, to tear down the hated barriers that had parted them and brought them to their untimely death. And when he was chosen as public envoy to the Governors of Coahuila and Texas and entrusted with valuable papers from the viceroy, his time for taking a share in the intrigues of his country had come, and with that singleness of purpose which came from both the Indian and Spanish blood in his veins sought the strongest leaders of the Repub-

licans and asked for adoption, not as Axtel Xamino, but under the name he had chosen, that of Carlos Lopez.

He agreed with the Revolutionists in their demands for better and freer government; he honored them for their nobility of purpose, and for their desire to better themselves and their growing children. Yes! he would serve them faithfully; their cause was just; he hated the oppressor wherever he was to be found; and much of the victory that old Jurez found easy, in after days, came from the clever plots and subtle scheming of Xamino's fertile brain.

When Cortez, in the fifteenth century, dethroned the Aztec chieftain, Montezuma, and usurped the realm, he divided the natives between the Church and the Crown, to become their future slaves. No man could receive any benefits from the Church or Government except those who had been born on Spanish soil.

With the passing of the centuries the native Indian had amalgamated with the Spaniards, producing the graded Mexican. To this class the father of Axtel Xamino had belonged—a new race of men, springing from the lap of despotism, and bringing up with themselves and their offspring a bitter hatred for the tyranny that ruled them. Out of these conditions the seeds of revolution were being continually planted with each successive generation.

Xamino had learned much of this at the old Jesuit mission, where the good fathers had

trained him in his earliest school days, and since becoming a man he had followed the history of his father's people from the earliest conquest of the country. His first opportunity to mingle in these affairs had come with the opening of his dual life, which began the day he was appointed as envoy to the Governors of Coahuila and Texas. He fulfilled his sovereign's mission in every particular; but he was dipping his slender brown fingers below the face of the waters, down deep where the current ran turgid, dark, and strong, and had carried many as brilliant as he to their doom.

The danger and hazard to life that menaced him in the perilous work he had chosen only added a keener incentive to act, and heated anew the flame in his blood. Versatile, easy in his manners and picturesque in his appearance, he had easily found his way into all the hearts so readily opened to receive him on that first day when he appeared among them at the Governor's mansion in the town of Bexar. He moved among them with the undulating grace of the Spanish noble, while within his slender body every nerve was like an electric wire for the receiving of messages.

As he stood beside the baize-covered table, around which the officials were gathered, he lifted his head with a proud gesture, and, with the sweeping, haughty glance of a sovereign looking upon his subjects, scanned the faces before him and pigeon-holed his men, for instinct-

ively he felt where each one of them belonged, from the governor down to his last aide-de-camp. Once he had placed his men and felt sure of himself, he selected those whom he had mentally decided would be the most valuable to him in his work, and upon these he bestowed his most fascinating and pleasing manners, giving marked distinction to the governor, as the local representative of his sovereign, the King of Spain. At the close of this his first state audience, he was extended an invitation by the governor to dine with him in his own home, and from there the young Mexican from Monterey soon found entrance into all the best families and homes in San Antonio.

Xamino had chosen old Don Arguella as the only man among the governor's attachés who possessed any noble qualities; in the faces of the others he read cruelty, bombastic courage, and selfish aggrandizement. "Not a warm-hearted patriot among them!" the watchful spy told himself.

When he found himself a welcome guest and a prime favorite with the old Don in his hospitable home, a twinge of conscience pricked his finer sense of feeling that he was not altogether what his old admirer believed him to be. He looked into the warmly tinted face and velvety dark eyes of Doña Arguella and thought how beautiful and young she was, and he wondered if his young mother had been as fair as she. As his mind went back to his girl-mother and her

tragic fate, his heart grew cold and he felt again the sullen tide of his hatred rising against the caste that had crushed her tender young life and raised the assassin's hand against his handsome young father while he was yet in the springtime of his love and youth. He would live to make every member of that hated caste suffer, so far as it lay in his power, he told himself.

Fate is strong and laughs in derision at man's formulated plans. Xamino was playing with fire. Eros, the golden-winged god of love, was drawing him closer and closer into his shining net every day that he came again to look into the soft, beautiful face of the lovely daughter of the old Spanish don.

A dusky red glow shone beneath the olive of his cheek when he saw that his suit was not repulsed, and his heart grew warm with its first flood-tide of love. It was this same love, grown strong within him, that prompted him to watch for her safety when the Royalists had fled from the town, seeking safety for their lives. Securing from his friends among the Revolutionists, who had taken the town, a sealed compact that the Arguella house should not be looted and that its inmates should remain undisturbed, Xamino made good his escape from the town, and, with some of the leading Royalists, fled toward the city of Monterey. When but a few miles beyond the town their party fell into the hands of a squad of guerillas, a fragment of the Revolutionary army, who were scouring the

woods surrounding the town to capture the fleeing bands of Royalists. With the quick dispatch significant of the times, the captives were executed on the spot where they were taken. The viceroy's messenger was the only man who escaped death, and he was held for a ransom from the Crown.

Finding himself a captive, and in the hands of the rebels, brought no dismay to the heart of the daring spy. He winced a little at the thought of entrapping men to their death, as he saw their lifeless forms before him, but he turned and rode away with the men who had captured him, who had received instructions from the rebel leaders to intercept the fugitives in their flight. He had given the route by which they were to escape into the hands of the enemy, and by so doing he had led the Spanish officers into their death trap, and placed upon his own head a ransom for his freedom.

While Axtel Xamino remained a prisoner of war, Carlos Lopez usurped his place, and while the battle of the Medina was being immortalized by its human slaughter, the old gray-haired viceroy at the castle of Chapultepec was eagerly waiting and watching for some news of the captive. In vain did he offer a bag of gold for his safe return; only the bitter ashes of disappointment came back to him in his melancholy atonement for the cruelty of that far-off time.

At last, when an age of suffering had passed over him, as it semed to his tortured soul, news

came, through a military caravan from the north, that the captive was safe and free in the city of Monterey. When the old viceroy found himself alone, after receiving the glad news, he made the sign of the cross and blessed himself, then went into the chapel, offered his confession, and made ready to receive the Blessed Sacrament to more effectively offer up devotions for the loved one's escape, while all the time in his heart he was telling himself, "It was the gold, the bag of gold that saved his life!" little dreaming, as he whispered the words low to himself, that the gold was being hoarded in the rebel stronghold at Monterey in the underground passage known only to the principal leaders of the Revolutionists.

CHAPTER IX

When Xamino left his disguise behind him and stepped forth from the rebel stronghold, his own real self, he was closely guarded by an ominous-looking band of dark, swarthy men, who sent a messenger to the Governor of New Leon at his mansion in Monterey to demand the bag of gold which the viceroy had forwarded to him for the ransom of his messenger. With the demand went also an urgent letter from Xamino himself, wherein he asked that the ransom be paid that he might be liberated from captivity. A guard was sent back with the messenger to pay the ransom and bring safely to the governor's mansion the King's loyal subject, whose life had been jeopardized in his services rendered for the Crown.

When Xamino saw the bag of doubloons pass into the hands of the band of ragged, half-starved Revolutionists, he told himself that the first payment, which would be only a part of the price for the outrage of his infancy, was being made. His captors faded away into the surrounding darkness, carrying their booty with them, and the governor's militia dared not fire upon them lest they call down a pack of the wild men, who were sure to be close by to protect their confederates.

Xamino allowed himself to be feasted and favored at the governor's home for several days after his liberation, before starting on his journey southward for the City of Mexico. When pressed by the governor for news of the rebel camps, and of how he fared among them during the period of his captivity, Xamino threw up his shapely brown hands with a deprecating gesture, and in his handsome face shone a look of repugnance. "Horrible! Privation, hunger, and destitution everywhere! Without clothes and without food—many of them have neither shoes nor hats—and their bodies covered with rags."

"With these conditions existing, the viceroy may report to the King that the revolution in his turbulent province is crushed," declared the governor.

Xamino sat silent, the while he was watching the speaker and reading the lines of his face as he listened to his words. At length he said: "As long as there is one of them left, he will find others to join him. They come from among the cacti and sage brush of the desert, and out of the arroyos and swamps. Their children's children will fight this same fight again ten, yes, twenty years from to-day, for their numbers will swell with the invasion of the Americans rather than decrease."

The governor shifted his seat in his chair, rolled and lighted his cigarette, pulled at his black goatee, and then in a nervous tone he

ejaculated: "Then the King must send fresh troops that we may be able to wipe the dogs from off the face of the earth."

Xamino's red lips curved with scorn beneath his silky black mustache, as he said to himself, "The governor is a fool upon whom one can play as upon a wind instrument. The viceroy has put men to rule in his high places who love their ease and comfort too well to take to their saddles and ride to the danger line, until they have seen the real condition of the country they are set to rule. Dotards! all of them, and good food for the hardy Revolutionists whose souls are aflame with the love of freedom. Cursed aristocracy, to raise such a palsied hand against men of endurance and courage like these!"

The men were both smoking, and through the blue, vapory clouds filling the room Axtel studied again the lines of the bloated, dissipated face before him.

"A despotic tyrant, selfish and cruel," he thought. The dry-rot of his own sensuality, like all the rest of them, has eaten the fire in his soul. The brave senors of the bush-range, unkempt and half starved, without food and raiment, could devour such dotards as the lion devours his prey!"

While Axtel conjured with the thoughts in his mind his companion succumbed to the alluring embrace of the glasses of pulque he had been drinking. Axtel rose to his feet, cast a last glance at the heavy sleeper and, turning, left

the room and went to seek his own apartments for the night.

From Monterey to the City of Mexico is a circuitous and tiresome route if taken by the overland trading road leading southward through the states of San Luis Potosi, Hidalgo, and Mexico. One may paddle down the San Juan to the Brana River, thence to the Gulf, and take ship at Matamoros for Vera Cruz. The latter was the route chosen by Xamino when he had finished his work in Monterey and started southward. From Matamoros to Vera Cruz he traveled in state, taking passage aboard a Spanish cruiser loaded with merchandise at the port of Lisbon and bound for Vera Cruz. At Vera Cruz he secured transportation with a caravan taking goods overland to the City of Mexico. It is this part of the journey that afforded to the eye of the traveler in that remote day an ever-changing scene of beauty. From the hot, pestilential climate of the narrow coast one passed gradually into the high interior, where the climate is mild and healthful. The tinkle of the tiny bells adorning the small bodies, and dangling from the necks of the little pack-mules, blended into one sleepy, sonorous sound, as the train moved in single file, along the white, sandy highway. Along the way from the coast to the interior, by the old Vera Cruz trading route, one may experience almost every gradation of climate, and find the productions peculiar to each zone, and if the journey be taken in the dry season,

the beauty of the scenery cannot be surpassed in any zone. The mahogany and rosewood trees disport their beauty to the eye of the traveler, and grow with the orange, the lemon, and the olive; interlacing itself amid the boughs of the trees is the beautiful vine of the vanilla bean; the gigantic palms near the coast are displaced on the high table-lands by the sturdy olive; while the floral kingdom displays sprays of every color held in Nature's dye-pot. When the caravan came in sight of the large maguey plantations, Xamino knew that his journey was almost at an end. The truculent maguey, thrusting its head from out its nest of huge, poniard-shaped leaves, yields the pulque for the national drink, which, when distilled, makes a strong, spirituous liquor, called mescal, which produces a drunken stupor when too freely imbibed by those who indulge.

As the caravan rounded the base of a high elevation, a sharp angle of the road was turned, and Xamino, dust-covered, travel-stained and weary, looked far ahead and saw rising before him the purpling mountains that shadowed beautiful Lake Chapala, and beyond, with her cathedral spires piercing the intensely blue sky, lay the City of Mexico and the far-famed castle of Chapultepec.

This was the seat of real danger, for around the City of Mexico the full strength of the revolution was centering, and none of the marplots indulging in the intrigues of army and state

knew the wires that were forming the intricate net better than did the viceroy's messenger, Axtel Xamino. Here, as in Coahuila and Texas, the guerrilla mode of warfare prevailed, the Royalists being harassed until the leaders of the Revolutionists could gather arms and supplies for a renewed attack upon the enemy. While Xamino courted the danger facing him, yet he used the subtlety of the well-trained spy, and suffered no stone or stick to pass him by without gleaning the significance it bore upon the issue confronting him. He realized that his hardest work had but just begun, and true to his inmost nature he braced himself for the conflict which he eagerly welcomed.

Far away, beside the beautiful Nueces River, in whose green valleys the countless herds of Hackett were grazing, there were two loving hearts that watched and waited for news of their friend. Each day brought renewed hope to the hearts of Hackett and his wife, but the day faded, and the sun sank in golden splendor out of sight, bringing the dull gray of evening, and still no word reached them. Old Emanuella Mendoza watched for him too, and told her beads for him at vesper time. Often, when she led her mustang down the bridle path to the opening, mounted him and rode over the green rolling prairie to help Norveta and Hackett with the herds, she looked with far-flung gaze toward the horizon; it was in the hope that something would

transpire before the day waned, and they might know if all was well with their friend who had done so much to help them in eluding their enemies.

Doña Arguella, likewise, waited in vain for news of the absent one. Antone Cortez, in his gold-laced uniform, embroidered boots, and powdered peruque, still followed her about like her shadow. Despite the fact that she lashed him with stinging sarcasm, and drove him from her, crazed with her pitiless ridicule, he always came again, buoyed up with the hope that he would win her in the end. The Royalists still held the town; Aradondo and his army occupied the presidio; and he was compelled to keep his men mobilized, for swift and sure did death meet any small band of Royalist troops who ventured beyond the borders of the town. It was claimed by some of the Spanish troops that behind every tree was concealed a guerrilla—and so it was. The guerrillas were men who had grown desperate, and inured to all kinds of hardships until they laughed in the face of death; lying in wait by sunlight and by moonlight to catch their prey; facing starvation to devote their lives to the one supreme motive power that actuated their existence—that of sweeping the hated Spanish from the face of the earth and regaining their beloved town.

There was but little life in the town save at the military quarters and at some of the grandees' homes, where there was much entertain-

ing and feasting of the officers from the fort. A fresh relay of young recruits had been sent to strengthen Aradondo's army—poor conscripts that Spain had sent to the shambles—and their enthusiasm must be kept alive lest the homesick soldiers prove a lame defense for the town.

The Arguella house was one of the homes most frequently thrown open to entertain the military from the post. Doña Arguella made as genial hostess as her father's fond heart could desire, for she longed to gain a controlling power over Aradondo and his officers, in order that, should she at any future day desire their leniency in behalf of Xamino, she would be in position to ask, nay, demand it. For this purpose she suffered Captain Cortez to follow her about like her shadow, and for this she flirted with the lieutenants and aide-de-camps and smiled into the bloated, dissipated face of their general. She danced with them through the gay measures of the old-time contra-dance, and the graceful whirl and undulations of the fandango; she served chocolate to the gay officers, with her own dainty hands, in the shade of the palmettos adorning the open court; but her heart's best love lay in the grasp of Xamino's slender brown hand. The days came and went, bringing but little change; the Spanish troops at the presidio formed almost all the life left in the town; only here and there could be seen a few relics of former days, before the present utter desolation had settled down over the town. Occasionally

an old adobe that had been left standing amid its patch of tangled undergrowth of climbing vines and flowering shrubs, looked at one out of its wilderness, with a quaint plea for the quiet loneliness entombing it, shutting it away from the outside world; a picturesque study for an artist, but a lonely habitation for man. And man did find his abode in some of these lonely places sometimes, usually people of the very poor class, whose worldly possessions consisted chiefly of a family of ragged children, a dog or two, a couple of burros, a goat or two for milk, and a weed patch nearby the doorway, where peanuts, tobacco and maize struggled with each other and fought with the weeds for supremacy. Gourd vines grew and clambered upon the rail fences everywhere in these poorer parts of the town; the star jessamine and the pomegranate, native children of the clime, clasped hands beneath the shade of the scarlet-leaved maples; and the tall, stately pine flourished with the sweet, graceful magnolia. To the west of the town ran a smooth stream, flowing out of a group of sparkling springs, shaded by a dense grove of sturdy live-oaks. Deep in the heart of the live-oaks, beside the waters of the largest of the group of springs, the adobe of old San Piedras Cotulla reared its head out of its jungle of wild-wood growth. He and his old senora lived their lives almost entirely alone, here in the heart of the big trees. Their only child, Antone, had been killed in one of the uprisals of the

town. Old Pedro gathered wild grapes through the long summer, and brewed his wine for the winter market; he hunted the wild game in the forest, and with the aid of his wife the meats were dried for the market; he raised his little patch of corn, tobacco, and sweet potatoes; and for the rest, wood and water, he had an abundance right at his door. And so he lived his tranquil life, no one taking much note of him, or he of the outside world. But old Pedro had a secret which he guarded with watchful jealousy. One day when he was out hunting he had come across a rich lead of pure gold up in one of the arroyos, and he guarded it jealously. He had marked the place so well that he could have found it through the black darkness of the midnight hour. He blazed the trees leading up toward the arroyo, and from there he went by signs such as round stones, boulders, and symbols that meant little to the eye of any one save himself. Not even the old senora shared his secret with him; he smoked his pipe beneath the shade of the live-oaks and dreamed of the vast wealth that would be his if ever the Revolutionists could succeed in driving the Spaniards out of the land. He dared not share his secret with any one lest his store of riches be taken from him and claimed by the Crown. He told himself when the town was free from the tread of the tyrant, and the republic was born, he would mine his gold and use it to beautify the springs and ground around them. Pleasure

crafts glided before him upon the face of the waters, and the turrets of a marble castle thrust their heads above the tops of the tall trees. He saw himself a man of prominence and influence, directing the affairs of the town, and his senora, gowned in the soft satins and silks he had seen the noble doñas of old Spain wear. But the time for the coming of the new régime dragged on leaden wings; only the desultory fighting of the guerrillas kept up hope in the hearts of those who were restive under the yoke of sovereignty; while the old town lay dormant, as though sleeping the sleep of exhaustion after a long series of hard-fought struggles, succumbing for the time, as the victim does when the clutch of the vampire is at his throat.

CHAPTER X

Hackett's hacienda covered acres of the most fertile lands in the Nueces Valley. He had bought a large grant of land from the Crown, and had selected the most fertile land he could find. The wild cattle and horses had had free range along the Nueces River, until they had grown and multiplied into vast herds. Save for the occasional raids made upon them by the Indians they were left to their wild, free life until the coming of the white man, of whom our friend Hackett was about the first.

As we see his ranch in the early morning of a blithe spring day, we quickly recognize the form of Hackett among the crowd of caballeros gathered about the branding pens. The bawling of young calves, the lowing of cattle, and the neighing of spirited horses, give energy and life to the surroundings. Troops of Mexicans are employed about the ranch and for the work of finding grazing ground over the plains for the fast increasing herds; great ribbons of blue smoke curl upwards from the wide mouthed chimneys of the low-spreading, bungalow-shaped dwelling, and the odor of the early morning meal spreads itself from the wide open doors upon the morning air.

Like most of the houses of the day, the walls

were of adobe, which is made from mud, moulded into large bricks and dried in the sun; the roof was flat, thatched with coarse grass and then covered with mud. The floors were of hardened earth and cement. Such houses are more comfortable for that hot climate than if built of wood. Hackett's varied a little from the generality in that the rooms were larger, more lofty, and admitted the coolness of the sweeping Gulf breeze through wide doors and deep windows, which closed with wooden shutters. A wide hall ran the full length of the house, and afforded a commodious place on hot summer days for the serving of the meals from the kitchen, which opened directly upon the passage-way that formed the hall for the living rooms in front. In the kitchen old Emanuella had trained Norveta in the preparation of the delicious edibles for which her home had been so notable among the grandees of San Antonio. Live-oaks, elms, and maple trees grew thickly about the yard and corrals, and their generous shade gave protection from the sun. Norveta was the happiest of wives, and busied herself through the long summer days in beautifying her home, and when she tired of this, she rode with Hackett after the cattle across the wide-spreading prairie. Emanuella Mendoza was left to employ her time as best pleased her fancy, which was to direct and manage for Norveta and assist her in kitchen affairs, and to overlook the peons who tilled the fields where grew

the supplies for the home, which consisted chiefly of maize, sweet potatoes, beans, and peas. She had her own mount and rode whither she pleased as long as she kept back from the firing-line of the Indians. But little marauding was done by the Indians on Hackett's beeves, and his home was never molested by them save when they would come to beg something to eat. He was kind to them, and cultivated upon his place each year a great field of tobacco to divide among them; he studied how to keep their friendship, and found much in their wild, untamed natures to like. Among the different tribes infesting the plains, he was known as the "Good pale face," "Big Sachem," and "Son of the Great Spirit." The several chiefs vied with each other for his friendship, and any of their braves caught pilfering from the "Big Sachem" was summarily dealt with by their respective rulers. By some of them the old senora was disliked, for sometimes she would pour vials of tempestuous wrath upon them when they would come begging at the kitchen door. Out of her store of Spanish vocabulary they could catch the full meaning of but one word—"vamoose!" followed by the crack of the leathern quirt which she kept hanging just over the kitchen door. The old senora argued that if they were fed to-day they would come again to-morrow, and it was always Norveta who followed after the redskins, in their sullen departure, and appeased their

anger with gifts of food, tobacco, or some token of a kindly feeling for them.

Friendly as were the Indians to Hackett, he never forgot his watchword—eternal vigilance—and to make the safety of his family doubly sure, he erected a strong stockade about his dwelling. Through this, at intervals, he made openings for the sighting and firing upon enemies approaching his stronghold.

The wild cattle Hackett found roaming the valleys and plains about him were much easier tamed and domesticated than the horses, or mustangs, as they were more commonly called. These gathered themselves together in vast herds, under one leader, whose methods man could not understand when making his commands known to the entire community. The flesh-devouring animals, such as wolves, panthers, jaguars, and mountain lions, which infested their habitations, were powerless against such foes. The vehemence of their onset was irresistible. The capture of these wild, fleet-footed creatures Hackett found to be very difficult, for in their wild state they are strong, swift, and wary. The riata, or lasso, a long plaited rope of leathern thongs, furnished at one end with an iron ring and the other extremity fastened to the saddle, made a formidable instrument with which to capture the fleetest stallion leading his hosts of wild attendants over the plains. Hackett was past-master in the construction and use of this instrument. When not

in use, he and his caballeros carried the rope in coils which hung from a projection of their saddles, but when their game was in sight the left arm slipped through the coils, and by means of the iron ring a slip noose was soon in the hands of the hunter with which he usually brought down his game. It was on such an occasion as this that we see Hackett and his men preparing for an onslaught upon a herd that had been sighted under the bluffs beside the river, where they had gathered at their watering-place. When the men were mounted, and their riatas hung ready for use at their side, they started in pursuit of the coveted game. Two men were sent on a circuitous route below the bluffs to frighten the herd, driving them northward, where Hackett and his men lay in wait for them. The "Big Sachem" was a goodly sight to see as he rode his mustang with graceful ease, his sinewy form showing to advantage in his doublet and gaiters of doe-skin, and his short trousers extending below the knee to meet the leathern gaiters. His face, save the brow which had been protected by the wide-rimmed sombrero he always wore, showed a healthy sun-tan, as also did the shapely neck where the collar of his doublet was left open to the breeze. He drew rein on the crest of a lofty ridge to reconnoiter, and remained there for several moments, sharply outlined in the brilliant morning sunshine against the intensely blue, cloudless sky. He lifted his hat for the

touch of the cool morning breeze, now stirring the grasses and laden with the perfume of wild prairie flowers. A sense of the infinite stole over him, striking an answering chord within his soul, as the sweetness of the morning breeze played around him. While he sat thus, waiting, he suddenly heard the thunder of rushing hoof-beats as the herds came fleeing up the valley. Slipping his left arm through the coils of his lasso, then firmly grasping the ring and leathern cord in his left hand to prevent the slip noose he was forming from slipping, he then grasped the center of the noose and the main cord in his right hand and was ready for action. His movements showed the skill of the adept, while a probe from the rowel of his big Spanish spurs upon the flanks of his mustang sent him after the fleeing herd with the speed of the wind, singling out for his prey a big black stallion, who was leader of the herd. Hackett rode a sorrel mustang with a long, lanky body, and legs with big joints and wide spreading hoofs—not much to look at, but strong in endurance and remarkable for swiftness. After half an hour of hard riding he could feel that his horse was gaining on the pursued game; he urged him on, and as he came close to the big black, whose flanks were flecked with lather and foam, Hackett raised himself slightly in his saddle, swinging the large noose in a circle four or five feet in diameter around his head, the weight of the iron ring giving it powerful impetus which enabled the

rider to hurl the leathern cord to its full length with deadly aim. He had proportioned the size of the loop to the distance that lay between him and the stallion, as the noose would gradually contract in diameter as it flew circling through the air. When caught the stallion was savage and ferocious at his discomfiture. The lasso being firm round his neck he nearly strangled himself by his plunging and struggling to get free. He kept this up for a few moments when his wind was so reduced that he was forced to stand still and gasp for breath. Hackett then dismounted from his horse, and keeping his hand firmly grasped upon the lasso he advanced cautiously toward the captured animal, hauling the rope tight whenever it tried to escape. In a short time he worked his way to the horse's head, and seizing its muzzle in his hand blew strongly in its nostrils. Overcome by some strange, undefinable influence, the horse became quiet and followed his captor around in a peaceable and bidable manner.

Several of the horses of the herd were captured by the well-trained caballeros, whose method differed from that of Hackett. They threw the animal during or after capture, one man seated himself upon the prostrate animal's head, while others girded a saddle tightly on his back, and forced a bit into his mouth. He was then allowed to spring to his feet, not too soon, however quick he could be, to prevent the skilful horseman from vaulting into the saddle,

from whence he could never be shaken off as long as the horse disobeyed his will. Within an hour each man has his horse bitted, mounted, and broken. Hackett had learned his method from the Comanches and neighboring Indians, and could handle his horse alone, while it sometimes took three or four men to capture and tame a wild horse after the gaucho's method. With the leader of the herd captured and made docile, the fleeing band halted in the upper end of the valley, and after much confused snorting and prancing aimlessly about, they settled down to grazing.

Hackett kept his hand close to the muzzle of the black stallion, and frequently petted him by rubbing his neck and patting him on the sides. Loosing the girth of his saddle from his mustang, he soon had it girded tightly on the back of the big black; holding to the bridle bit he had already thrust into his mouth, he led his captive about until he became accustomed to the dangling of the stirrups at his sides; he then mounted him and with but little more trouble rode on after the main herd, closely followed by several of his gauchos who had not yet secured a mount.

By ten o'clock several more of the horses had been captured and subdued, and as the sun's rays were beginning to pour down with an uncomfortable heat, Hackett and his men returned with their captives to the ranch. The horses were put into a corral, and their heads having been fastened securely to the snubbing post,

they were then ready to receive their master's brand. This device was unique and suggestive; it consisted of an iron bar wrought in the shape of a pair of hearts thrust through with an arrow; this iron was heated to a red glow and pressed firmly upon the quivering flesh of the animal until it burned through to the flesh and left its scar, which could never be effaced. It was a custom that had originated among the Spaniards, and had been extensively used in Mexico at that time, both in sheep and cattle raising, the practice extending to horses as well.

Hackett had wrought his own branding iron from a rod heated over the forge at the smithy's shop he had erected for his own private use on his ranch. A fond smile had lit his handsome face as he held up the completed irons before Norveta's eyes for her admiration. She had stood near him while he welded the iron, and as he held them before her eyes he said, "See, Chiketa, how strongly our hearts are bound together—'until death doth part us,'" and drawing her close within his arms he had pressed a lingering kiss upon her warm red lips. They walked away from the forge toward their cabin, with their arms interlocked, making soft love speeches to each other as they went. They had loitered under the shade of the trees about the doorway, for it was cooler here, and they both

loved the outdoor life which filled so many of their days. Hackett never let himself grow away from his wife in the pursuit of his labors about his ranch. He kept alive the old courtship of the first days when he won the love of his bride. To him she was ever the sweet maiden with dark, soft eyes, shining upon him with the tender love-light that held him captive; and he never let a day go by without giving her a part of his time, drawing her away from all others to be with him, alone, and telling her again in his own natural way how he loved her, and what a wholesome, goodly sight she was in his eyes.

In the evening, when supper was over and the dishes cleared away, they would come out and sit in the moonlight, as it filtered through the branches of the big trees, Norveta, with her guitar, singing soft and low her old Spanish love ballads, and Hackett lounging upon the grass at her feet, smoking his brown briar-root pipe of his own make. The old senora would come out too, and sit where the sweet night breeze was playing hide-and-seek among the leaves of the trees. Dreamily, as the poetry of the soft summer nights lay about her, she would drift in a mental vision back to the days when her other loved ones were around her. Shadows were falling over her path during these days, and the end of the road was beginning to dawn

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upon her sight. She was living, as the old oft-times do, in the past. In retrospect, she looked again upon the golden days of her happy wifehood, when the magical goblet of life's best blessing was at her lips. To-night the ranch, with its attendant surroundings, has faded from her ken, and she is again beside the waters of the river flowing through beloved old San Antonio.

CHAPTER XI

In the shadows of the castle of Chapultepec, with its wide-spreading parks and its great, kingly cypress trees, walks the Spanish viceroy, and beside him strolls the graceful, elegantly groomed Xamino, special messenger to the states of Coahuila and Texas.

They were talking of the wild and tumultuous provinces beyond the Grande-del-Norte, or, as it was more often called, Reo Brana. The white-haired viceroy was listening attentively to his messenger, who was saying, "Your governors do not understand the work you have assigned to them. They drink pulque, and smoke strong tobacco, and spend their days dallying with the hours to win favor in the black eyes of the senoras and senoritas of the capitals. You are impoverishing yourself and the King in your struggle to hold a strong army. Why not turn more of your time and attention to the mines? Over there are many arroyos filled with gold, waiting only to be mined."

"I dare not weaken the strength of the army, Xamino; the Revolutionists would find me unprepared should they rise again; and yet thou hast seen with thine own eyes, my son, these beds of gold. Tell me, is it indeed as much as thou sayest?"

"Mucho riqueza—medre mia—gold—gold!" exclaimed Xamino, and the slim brown hands were spread wide to emphasize his words as he spoke, the slender arms sweeping through space as though vainly seeking to bound the limitless margin of the vast mines of gold hid away in the heart of the mountains through which he had been traveling.

"What I fear most, Xamino, and that which strikes my heart with fear and apprehension, are these accursed Americans. The Revolutionists lack cohesiveness; there is rivalry among their leaders, and they are impoverished. But for the Americans aiding them as the colonies grow stronger, they would give up the struggle. In a message I am now preparing for them there will go to each of the governors my urgent command that they spare no effort to exterminate all Americans who seek to encroach upon the King's domain. But the mines! This gold we must have, and to get it the mines must be operated. I tell you, Xamino, that gold we must have!" A covetous light shone in the viceroy's eyes as he spoke.

A dull flush tinted the envoy's face, and his heart beat high with exultation at the viceroy's interest in the mines.

"Once his greed for the gold hid away in the mountains gets a stronger hold on his avaricious soul," he thought, "this accursed horde of butchers he keeps in leash, ready to turn loose any moment on the storm-beaten, ragged, and

half-starved bushmen, will begin to weaken. Loosen the lust for gold among his soldiers and see how soon the mines will claim them. Whenever he thinks the spirit of the revolution dead, and he turns to the mines, then a better day will dawn for the brave senors of the esplanada."

He was looking away toward the line of pickets that stood guard over the castle and its attendant surroundings, but he saw not the uniformed soldiery, so intent was his mind upon the work he had in hand; he saw before his mind's eye the fulfillment of his plans, making his lithe, brown body vibrate with emotion.

"Tsa!" he ejaculated half aside to himself, "I must incite him more vehemently still if that be possible," and turning toward the viceroy, with a calm, unruffled exterior, he said in half-leisurely tones, "Leave the sword lie idle for a while, and use your men to work the mines; then will New Spain have her coffers filled with gold—more than any nation has ever yet known!"

Again the covetous light shone in the greedy eyes of the viceroy. "The King's gold!" he ejaculated, musingly, as though half aside and to himself.

"Yes, the King's and the viceroy's gold, tons of it, waiting to be brought forth from those mines," answered the messenger in sympathetic tones, as though in full accord with the wishes of his viceroy.

They ceased speaking for a moment—a pause,

during which the old white-haired viceroy was the plaything of Fate, then turning to the small, brown-skinned man whose every nerve was on the alert, he said, "Get the gold for me; I must have it!" His tone was tense and strong as he continued, "Your blood is young and full of fire; mine is old and chilled with age; you must lead the way. Do it cautiously, and as you go forth on your journey seek in every way possible to find any fragment of the spirit of the revolution that may yet exist, lest we make a mistake and leave a fire smouldering somewhere." He handed Xamino a packet of papers as he still continued speaking. "Take these, and when you have delivered them into the hands of each of the governors, give them also other commands I shall intrust to you, in which I shall express my desire that they assist you in any work you may see fit to take up for the Crown within their provinces; you will find that I make special mention of the gold mines." He turned away to re-enter the castle as he finished speaking.

Xamino was left alone, and as he stood waiting the viceroy's return, he paused beneath the drooping branches of a large cypress tree. He leaned against the trunk of the tree, and taking his tobacco pouch from his pocket, prepared a smoke for himself, and as he lit the weed and puffed the blue smoke upward, he looked away through an opening of the cypress boughs into the ether, where he let his eyes follow the flight

of a buzzard—the Mexican eagle. The smoke faded, the light died out, and still he followed the lazy, circling flight of the buzzard until it lit upon a tuna far away. He was lost in his thoughts as these words escaped him, "Go to your unclean feast, foul bird of prey, like the vultures whose emblem you are. Plunge your talons in the carcass of your victim, and in gluttony gorge your gullet, as do your paramours when the feast is theirs!" The matchless mouth, with its curves and lines, wore a smile of derision, as with a half-drawn sigh he finished his reverie and came back to his surroundings. The smart soldiery were still strutting to and fro on the picket line, guarding the splendid grounds with their century-old cypress trees; troops of slaves, in brightly colored service garb, were moving about the castle and grounds, attending to their different duties; and beyond the gates were drawn up in line the cavalcade that was to escort the viceroy's messenger safely to the port of Vera Cruz, from whence he was to set sail for Matamoras, en route for a second interview with the governor of the turbulent province of Texas.

Xamino finished his smoke, and yet the commandante had not returned. He moved about impatiently, dug the toe of his small morocco boot into a tuft of the soft grass growing at his feet, kicked it out of his way, and moved on. He drew himself erect, tightened his sword

hilt, and gave a salute of honor as the viceroy approached him with the parchment in his hand.

"These are my orders and commands to the governors—that you be given all power and liberty in your work at their capitals, as my special messenger and authorized envoy. I have made particular mention of the gold and silver mining, and prospecting for leads. You have herein your first stepping-stone to the future viceroyship of Mexico. See to it that you fulfill the duties entrusted to you with unblemished honor, for the King, thus redeeming yourself of the base blood of the old Meztico Indian; and when my old form shall rest in the last slumber, the honors I now hold shall be yours, and the mantle of royalty shall fall about your shoulders."

Xamino's fingers closed over the parchment with a vice-like grasp; he drew back a pace, a haughty mien in his whole bearing, and in cold, steady tones replied, "Sire, I care not for the robes of royalty, or for gifts of honor from the King; I ask only to serve my country, and the pleasure it gives me to be of service to her is all the return I ask."

The old viceroy did not understand the double meaning of his words, nor was he conscious of the insult he had offered the youth in referring to his father's origin. Had he not nurtured the child since first it was taken from its mother's breast, until the aboriginal stain had been wiped out of his blood? Had he not made his confes-

sion as to his share in the crime of assassinating his daughter's young lover-husband, and at her death taken care of the babe of low origin? The past was buried; and the future should retrieve all the mistakes of the rash youth of those heedless lovers, by the babe, now grown to man's estate. Thoughts like these had grown to be fixtures in the mind of the old viceroy, until he had ceased to consider that any injustice had ever been done to the boy. He was building for his future; and the words he had just uttered told the trend of his diplomatic manipulation of the future viceroyship of Mexico when he himself would no longer be among the living. He looked after the gay chevalier as he mounted and rode away, closely followed by his cavalcade of outriders and guardsmen. "He shows the royal blood of the Alhambra; with the blood of kings flowing in his veins, what possibilities may the future not hold for him!" soliloquized the old white-haired viceroy.

Xamino and his men faded from his view while he yet gazed after them; then turning, he went back to his courtiers in waiting. Leaving them in the audience chambers waiting, while he attended his messenger in person to the outer gates, had served to raise the indignation of the viceroy's courtiers, and murmurs of displeasure could be heard from many of them.

"It is Xamino, the dreamer, who takes the viceroy from his duties and courtesy to his courtiers!" said one, bolder than the others. They

shrugged their shoulders and superciliously lifted their eyebrows, with here and there the audible comment, "No base blood from the house of Chapultepec; its favors are only for the noble-born!"

The dissenters forgot their querulous tones, and made low obeisance to the viceroy as he reappeared among them. He set about his work, but the hours soon began to drag as the heat grew more intense with the coming of the noon hour. With the Spaniard's native repugnance to real labor, he dismissed his courtiers and sought the quiet coolness of his own private apartments, now heavily shaded from the hot rays of the noon-tide sun. They were the same rooms that had once resounded to the tread of Cortez when seeking quiet and rest from the throngs about him. His interest had gone with the traveler from whom he had that morning parted; and the covetous desire for the gold hid away in the mountains was still with him. He knew that danger lurked all along the way the cavalcade was to travel; guerrilla bands infested the roads throughout the entire country about the capital; but his mind dwelt more upon the gold than upon the safety of the one who went to seek it for him. He was getting old and he felt it; he longed for private riches that he might shift his duties to younger shoulders and spend the remainder of his days in luxury and ease.

Along the dusty highway rode the gay cavalcade, the guards on the alert for the ambushed

enemy along the way. Xamino, the viceroy's especial messenger, was the least concerned of any of them. Gradually the road they were traveling led them by a series of winding curves from the high tablelands down to the lower levels where the real tropical climate prevailed, and the rank vegetation of the torrid zone abounded, and birds of the most brilliant plumage vied in color with the orchids growing profusely in the forest.

Through this rich valley ran the pack-trail from Vera Cruz to the capital, and it was this highway that Xamino and his cavalcade were traveling. At frequent intervals the travelers met pack-trains, heavily laden with rare stuffs and costly merchandise for the use and adornment of the luxury-loving colonists of the New World. Goods and merchandise to the value of more than twenty million dollars a year were carried laboriously over the mountains by these countless, indefatigable mule-trains, requiring thousands of mules each year to recruit and maintain the service. The pack-trail led through Puebla—of the angels—founded by Fray Garces, Mexico's first bishop. As the legend goes, the good bishop, surprising in a vision two angels with line and rod, while they were planning the situation for a celestial city, immediately appropriated the site, thus sharing with the angels in the glory of the city's birth. Xamino and his cavalcade entered the town as the evening bells were chiming from the cathedral.

Sweetly the sound of the bells fell upon the evening air, floating out over the colossal building, so infinitely rich in its interior adornment, with its altar and fonts and great tables of onyx, and its candelabra of silver and gold, its beautiful Flemish tapestries, and richly carved woodwork of the great organs, whose rich, mellow notes could be heard waking the stillness of the evening as the bells ceased ringing. At the sound of the vesper bells, men, women, and children, with the deep salaam of the Oriental, approached the sacred services of the altar, prostrating themselves in their impassioned way. The travelers tarried for the night, and as day dawned they resumed their journey toward the coast.

Arriving at Vera Cruz, Xamino dismissed his attendants, retaining not even his body servants —slaves given him by the viceroy—for his own personal attendance. He wanted no restrictions in the work he was going to do. He saw his luggage placed safely aboard the skipper that had shouldered its way into the line of tubs at anchor along the dingy old wharf, then he took leave of his friends and went aboard the vessel as it was loosing its moorings and backing out into deeper water, preparatory to hoisting sail.

As the skipper was rolling away over the outgoing tide Xamino turned and waved a farewell to the town, the wharf, and the port—that port through which passed all the great chests of

silver and gold that freighted the galleons of Spain, and the boxes of rare and costly fabrics from Oriental looms, for the adornment of the sons and daughters of the grandees and hidalgos of New Spain.

CHAPTER XII

The military band was playing in the Plaza-de-las-Yslas, and the governor, walking in the grounds surrounding his mansion, heard the music and was glad. It had pleased his fancy to set apart a space of time for a series of festive amusements, and this, the initial day, was being ushered in with a great military display, and the military bands were playing in the open on the Plaza. Crowds, in gala attire, strolled idly beneath the shade of the trees, and listened to the music as they admired the battalions of soldiery from the presidio, marching in full-dress parade. The gay calash of Don Arguella, drawn by spirited horses in their silver-mounted harness and splendid trappings, dashed up to the scene, while the band was playing for the cavalry troops to fall in line for maneuvers. Captain Cortez saw the gay equipage as it made its first appearance, and his heart swelled with pride, for he was conscious of the perfect fit of his gold-laced uniform, and the splendid appearance he could make before the women when mounted in his saddle and commanding his troops.

Doña Arguella was looking superb in her light summery costume, as she lounged gracefully amid the cushions of the open calash, whose top

was thrown back to admit the cool morning breeze. She saw the dashing Captain Cortez, so elegantly groomed in his brilliant military trappings, but it was the captain's horse she admired most, so gaily caparisoned and prancing with grace. Her gaze lingered upon the mettlesome horse for several moments, then, looking the captain over carelessly, she turned her gaze and scanned the crowd far and near for some one whom she failed to see. The old Don was looking the well-born aristocrat, in his suit of white linen, with his wide-rimmed panama hat resting jauntily upon his iron-gray hair. He was delighted with the bright scene before him, but Doña, failing to find what she was looking for, asked to be driven to another part of the grounds.

"Certainly, my dear, if you wish it; but dost thou not enjoy the soldiers' gay attire?" asked her father. "The captain, methinks, is looking uncommonly fine this morning in his braids and laces of gold. Doth he fail to find favor in thine eyes, my Doña? Have you heard the late news of the presidio—that the captain has found favor with the King, and is soon to receive his brevet direct from the hands of royalty?"

"Not the brevet and the gold lace, but the man beneath, father, would I choose to know first," replied his daughter, as she adjusted the black lace mantilla about her shoulders, furled her wide fan, and leaned forward as though about to give orders to the slave who stood hold-

ing the mettlesome horses by the bit. Instantly the old gentleman was all alacrity, and with his native chivalrous desire to please, gave the order for her, "To the tournament grounds," and at his words the driver tightened his reins, the slave at the horses' heads loosened his hold and sprang upon the box-seat beside the driver as the horses dashed away toward the tournament grounds.

The tournament grounds lay out on the open esplanade, beyond the bull-ring, the amphitheater, and the cock-pits, for the matadors at the bull-ring and the fowls about the cock-pits were to furnish much of the amusement for the summer festival during the next few days. At the tournament grounds rockaways, carryalls, and calashes were drawn up in line to view the knights as they ran the race. The Arguella conveyance had not yet secured an advantageous viewpoint, despite the fact that its occupants were the proudest gentry of the town. A knight within the ring, or palisade, discovering who the newcomers were, and seeing their dilemma, spurred his horse into a swinging gallop, and as he passed out through the opening at the north end of the course, he turned his horse's head and rode direct toward the rockaway, drawn by Don Arguella's mettlesome steeds. A rosy flush spread over the beautiful face of Doña Arguella, and her small ears grew crimson beneath the tiny bonnet of white fluffy lace, illusion, and pink rosebuds, that perched upon her dusky

black hair. She recognized in the knight who had come to their relief the one for whom she had been looking. The envoy from Mexico, who had been but a few days in San Antonio, had been chosen as one of the knights who was to ride for the golden cup at the tournament; this fact had been made known to Doña Arguella only the day before, and although Axtel Xamino had already been three days in the town, he had been unable to arrange for a visit to the Arguella home. The sting he had received from the viceroy concerning his father's low origin, as they were taking leave of each other more than a month ago, still rankled in his breast. He had waited for Doña Arguella to give some sign that she wished to see him before he made his appearance before her in the sanctuary of her own home. As the knight approached, he lifted his helmet and bowed low to the occupants of the open carriage, his own face mantling with a dull red glow, for his quick eye had caught the flush of pleasure and look of delight on the fair Doña's face when she first recognized him. When he had led them to a place from whence they could view the lists to advantage, he gave a cordial handshake to Don Arguella, who heartily wished him success in the contest; then turning, he rode back into the grounds within the palisade. Doña settled herself comfortably among the cushions of her carriage and prepared to enjoy the scene before her. She was conscious of a great happi-

ness within, and in her large dark eyes a soft love-light was shining.

At each end of the lists a number of tents were pitched; to each tent one knight belonged, and before one of these tents Xamino paused and dismounted. Doña Arguella's eyes followed him until he entered his tent, before the door of which stood his squire, who was to attend him in his final mount. About the stables black vassals stood, waiting to lead the chargers forth. Near the vassals stood the trumpeter with the bugle which was to sound the charge. The tournament had been regulated something after the passage-at-arms of Prince John's time and the days of Richard the Lion-hearted.

Outside the lists were elevated seats, like those of a race course, for the convenience of the spectators. Culminating the general arrangements was a brightly decorated gallery in the center of the eastern side of the lists, which was graced by a sort of throne and canopy, carpeted and cushioned, waiting for the coming of the fair maiden whose knight would crown her queen of the festive scene.

Among pennons and flags, small and large, which sported to the breeze, burning hearts, bleeding hearts, bows and quivers, and many other emblems of Cupid's triumph, were emblazoned the words, "Queen of the Tournament," but no fair form yet sat upon the throne of Beauty and Love.

Several small boys and girls, dressed in fancy

robes of bright colors, served as pages and awaited the coming of their queen. Two armed and mounted men, acting as field marshals, rode to and fro the full length of the lists to enforce and preserve order. King John, in his royal robes, sat enthroned at the opening, and was to act as ruler of the tournament. Each knight was named for some locality—"Fowl of the Air," or "Denizen of the Forest;" and each knight had his emblem blazoned upon the robe covering his charger. Our friend Xamino was "Knight of the Black Eagle." After all preparations had been completed, the trumpeter gave a loud call on his bugle, and at the sound each knight stepped from his tent as his charger was led forth, grasping their spears and shields from their squires, and with helmets tight-drawn, they mounted and rode into the open, their brightly colored sashes contrasting with the color of the robes worn by their chargers, red, yellow and blue. Unlike the original passage-at-arms that was fought to the death with the battle-axe, this was after the modified role of the most skilful lance capturing the largest number of metal rings suspended from cross bars erected upon poles, running the full length of the lists. The knight who captured the largest number of rings during each successive dash was winner of the tournament, and secured the golden cup, or trophy, and likewise was given the power to crown his lady-love queen of the tournament.

As the trumpeter sounded the charge there was flashing of lances and clashing of shields as each knight sought an advantageous inroad for the coveted rings. Amid the mad cheering of the spectators, the horses passed the poles of the lists with lightning rapidity, their necks outstretched and their nostrils distended as they emerged at the north opening, as deeply imbued with the sport as were their riders.

When the dust, raised by the trampling of so many horses' feet, that darkened the air, had cleared away, the knights were seen returning to their tents; the first dash was over. The trumpets brayed, and fans fluttered and waved in the galleries, and then came another pause of breathless excitement as five fresh knights, attended by their squires and armed cap-a-pie, rode forth and made ready for the second dash. This was repeated until the gallant knights began to show the effects of the fray. All that was graceful and fanciful in their garb had become dust-covered, and their plumes were bedraggled with the fierce struggle of the contestants for the victory.

Breaking the rules, and crowding their opponents out of line, had barred many of the knights from finishing in the game. The knights who were yet left in the field rode with stubborn determination, and pressed hard for the victory before the closing of the heat. Women waved their handkerchiefs and screamed their encour-

agement as they urged their favorite knights onward; men cheered until their voices were hoarse and their throats sore. The last dash of the closing heat was between two riders who had been left victors of the field, the only remaining knights who had not broken some of the rules and thus barred themselves from the lists.

One of the knights remaining in the field was Xamino, Knight of the Black Eagle, and the other, a Knight of St. George, was an American, tall, fair-haired and of muscular build. He rode a horse of English foal, whose stock had been cradled in Virginia in the seventeenth century. The rider himself was of an old English family which had taken root in American soil, and was within the "purple circle" of English aristocracy, as one of its founders in the old colony. The spirit of adventure had brought him, as it was bringing many of the American colonists, to the Southwest, so full of alluring possibilities.

The "Black Knight," as he had been termed during the joust, was cheered vociferously by the crowd in the Latin tongue—for the sport was a new game to the Spaniards and Mexicans, and had been brought among them with the advent of the Americans. The Knight of St. George, with scarlet plume and helmet, was pressing the Mexican hard for the victory; their faces were begrimed with dust and perspiration, their horses lathering with sweat, their flanks foam-flecked and dripping.

"Bang! Burr-er! Whiz-ziz!" and the last ring is captured, thus closing the last heat of the tournament. The knights delivered their trophies to the heralds in waiting, and when the count was made, it was found that the Black Knight had won the honors of the field. Instantly the crowd became wild with enthusiasm, and loud cheering for the victorious knight filled the air, reaching far beyond the lists.

The cheering ceased, and for a few moments there was silence; a breathless pause of abated expectation held the crowd, as all eyes watched the movements of the victorious knight, to see upon what fair maiden's head he would place the crown. The field marshal cleared the way for the black-helmeted hero, who rode slowly by the galleries, looking smilingly up into the fair faces whose bright eyes were watching his every movement. Far up in one of the galleries a bright young face gazed down upon the black-helmeted knight, and a gleeful laugh broke the stillness; it was one of the pages beside the throne, awaiting the coming of the Queen, who had given vent to the exuberance of his pleasure at the novel scene. The knight urged his horse past the galleries and beyond the opening. He rode on to where the calash of Don Arguella stood, his shield lowered, and as he approached he leaned slightly forward, and with his bright shining lance uplifted he reached forward, and touching lightly the arm of Doña Arguella, he

left the coveted crown resting in her lap. Again the crowd cheered loud and long, to see the beautiful Doña Arguella, she who was so well loved by every one for her royal nature and her fair face, the proud Castilian maid, fairest of all the beautiful Spanish maidens of San Antonio, crowned Queen of Beauty and Love.

The amphitheater was packed with a typical Mexican and Spanish throng; it was a scene familiar to them since their infancy, and more thrilling than the tournament, for the bull, in his death agonies, was to satiate their bloodlust, which the past few days of rioting had aroused anew. The silken-girdled matadors, with their sharp prods, had roused the beast's most demoniacal fury. With bloodshot eyes, and blood spurting from nose and mouth, the mad bull, insane with his suffering, made charge after charge upon his agile and cunning enemies. There was a gasp, an indrawn breathing of the packed humanity up in the amphitheater, as the bull made a furious rush at his antagonist only to receive his death wound. Lowered in the dust, and weltering in his own blood, the beast was left to breathe out his last; the gay matadors had earned their gold and received their applause from the merry crowd, and the bull fight, like the tournament, had become a thing of the past.

Around the cock-pits could be heard volleys of oaths, as the swarthy champions of the birds contended for the rights of the fowls upon which they were betting. Not infrequently, too, did the contestants clinch in a bloody fight. With eager zest this well-loved sport had been followed each day of the week's amusement. No small number of the birds had been sacrificed, and the lives of men as well, in the pursuit of this favorite pastime. It had pleased the governor to see his subjects roused from the sleepy lethargy that had lain so long upon the town. He sat alone on the closing night of the week's mad revelry. He was reading the viceroy's message, and from time to time, as he was reading, he would lift his head and listen to the noises rising from the town. The noise was loud and threatening; the governor frowned, laid aside the papers he was reading, and summoning a courier, sent a command to the presidio to disperse the crowds on the streets, but none of the revelers were to be harmed. His Excellency feared an outbreak, for many strangers from near by had come into the town for the week's merry-making; buccaneers from the coast, rough fishermen, and sea pirates who had their hiding-places along the Gulf coast, had drifted inland to get a peep at civilization and the soft, pretty faces of women. As the governor heard the bugle call from the presidio,

he knew his message had been delivered and that his command would be executed. The conviction brought a look of relief into his face, and he returned to the viceroy's parchment, leaving the troops to take care of the town and repress any outburst.

CHAPTER XIII

It was the night of the tournament ball at the home of Don Arguella, and the old house was looking its best. The tall and stately candelabra, used only on festive occasions, were lighted and threw a mellow light throughout the rooms. The lofty ceilings and the richly frescoed walls gave a stately air that served to enhance the picturesqueness of the surroundings.

The rooms were filled with the grandees of the town; military men, wearing the gay, brilliant Spanish uniform, lent a distinguished air to the scene; debonair Captain Cortez was looking elegant in his fine array, but his handsome face wore a scowl, for the day's festivities had not culminated to suit him. He had conceived a bitter hate for the Mexican envoy.

The ball-room filled early; and eager, happy faces wore the brightest of smiles. Very pretty the senoritas looked in their airy, cool, ball-room costumes. The Spanish caste of features predominated among them, though hair of other shades than black could be seen, commonly dressed with fluffy loops over the ears, and drawn high into a coil, where it was held in place by high-backed combs and long pins with lobes of gold for heads. Most of the combs were set with jewels; the less pretentious were decorated

with rows of shell-like beads, some coral and some pearl colored.

The gowns worn by the women of dignity and position were of heavy satins and rich brocades of different shades of red and yellow, but the young senoritas were gowned in flowered silks or white tulle. Coquettish little jackets of black velvet, much bespangled and elaborately embroidered, set off many of the young girls' gowns, and gave the decidedly picturesque touch so dear to the heart of the splendor-loving Spanish nature. Generally the dress had long, pointed bodice, and full, flowing skirt, the bodice cut to reveal the neck and arms. A raised seat had been prepared for the musicians at one side of the long salon. There was a side door near where they sat, and a troop of little Mexican boys, in scarlet and yellow garb, were kept busy, under the directorship of the old Don, bringing and taking trays filled with glasses and tankards of wine, which they served to the musicians and those of the guests who cared to partake. After each visit of the tankard, the fiddles and guitars were made to pour forth renewed bars of melody, and the nimble feet of the dancers flew faster to the swift-flying measures of the dance.

Axtel Xamino, the handsome young Mexican, had waited and watched all evening for a word with Doña Arguella. In vain did the soft-eyed senoritas cast encouraging glances at him; he held aloof from them, waiting. They chatted

among themselves in murmurs about him, for it was known that he had traveled much through Mexico and the Californias, was the boldest rider in all the North, and they spoke of him as the handsome California grandee. He had spent a part of his youth with the friars at the old San Miguel mission, amid the cold fogs and thule lands of upper California. Here he had learned to ride far afield when but a lad, and riding had ever been one of his favorite sports. He had ridden on the tournament grounds with the same zest he had felt up there among the foot-hills beyond the gray, cold fogs.

He had been detained in the early part of the evening, and now he was waiting to pay his deference to his fair hostess. He wore the evening dress of Monterey—black trousers, short to the knees, and buckled over white silk stockings; black shoes with gold buckles; gold buckles fastened the trousers at the knees; a white silk waistcoat, adorned with quantities of fine lawn and lace, fitted the slender form, the lace of the sleeves falling over the slender brown hand, whose fingers could close upon a sword hilt with a grip of steel. From beneath his white silk waistcoat, which was partly open, fell the soft folds of a silken sash, gold-colored and deeply fringed at each end, the black velvet of his short trousers throwing the yellow of his sash into bold relief. He was all things in one; for tonight he was the powdered and perfumed dandy,

the elegant prince of fashion, seeking to appear his best in the eyes of his lady-love, who was herself so dainty and fastidious. He liked best his leathern doublet and gaiters, the freedom of his saddle, and to sleep beneath the stars, wrapped in his zarape; but it pleased her to see him in this array, and the punishment was forgotten in the opportunity to please her.

The contra danza, not unlike the square dance of to-day, was forming as he at last succeeded in finding his young hostess and securing her for his partner. This native dance is far more graceful than ours, and the men rival the women in their supple movements. Captain Cortez and the governor's daughter whom he had secured as his partner—a beautiful brunette, gowned in a stately brocade of pink satin, with garnitures of finest black lace at neck and arms—were to be the couple opposite the envoy and his lady. As the measures of the dance opened it was a rare sight to see the dancers gliding and swaying to the sound of the music, their pliant grace as facile as grain bending before the breeze. Little slippers twinkled beneath the Doña's silken skirts; and the sinuous turns and undulations of her beautiful figure but deepened the mad love of the two men before her, and for one of them she was now dancing. The contra danza finished, Xamino and Doña Arguella joined hands in the graceful measures of the Spanish fandango, much to the chagrin of Cap-

tain Cortez, who had already discerned the Doña's secret. Never had he seen her move with such grace as to-night; never had he seen her beautiful face so radiant and her eyes sparkle like great stars; no maid of the Orient could have danced this old dance of Moorish origin with more native grace than did the happy Doña to-night. Xamino kept movement in unison with her, his slender form as graceful as a woman's, a dull flame of red glowing beneath the olive of his cheek, his heart beating high, for he felt himself preferred by the beautiful maid before him, who filled all space, nay, the universe itself, for him. The enraged captain could no longer endure the sight of his rival's victory, for he read love for the dark-faced envoy in the fair Doña's eyes, and when his partner was claimed he bowed and strode angrily from the salon. Fairfax, the young Virginian who had ridden a tilt with Xamino in the tournament, had supplanted Cortez with the governor's daughter, and his vanity was stinging from the successive bruises. Cortez wore, as did the other officers of the presidio and fort, the full-dress uniform—white coats with red velvet vests, red pantaloons with silken sash, or white trousers and scarlet coat faced with green, a silken sash of gold color, white silk stockings, and black shoes with buckles of gold. A heavy scowl shadowed his face as he passed out into the night air which was blowing in sweet and fragrant, through the open windows,

fanning the cheeks of the good-looking caballeros as they paid court to the charming, vivacious senoritas.

When the hour had arrived for the serving of refreshments, the dining-room door was thrown open to the liveliest burst of music. The long table was almost covered with its silver service, and loaded with evidences of Doña Arguella's generous skill, chicken with rice and rich gravies, oysters, tamales, dulces, pastries, fruits, and wines. The old Don, as host to his guests, was the living portrayal of the Spaniard's elegant and profuse hospitality. Near the close of the supper the old Don rose to his feet, and from the glass of wine he held in his hand he drank to the prosperity of San Antonio and to the long life of Spanish rule throughout the province. The hostess turned her eyes toward her companion at the board, Don Xamino, who was instantly upon his feet with a response, full of eloquence, for the continuation of such delicious and irresistible hospitality as he was now permitted to share. A curve of scorn twitched the lips of Captain Cortez; he hated the envoy, and fain would cast a doubt upon his sincerity. He had his suspicions of the young grandee who stood so high in the governor's esteem and friendship; but he would bide his time that, when he did strike, he might strike with a heavy hand. The toasts were applauded, and as the conversation of the guests became gay and animated Doña Arguella spoke in

modulated tones to the attentive ear by her side.

"Would you forsake Monterey to live in San Antonio, senor? You love her so well."

He answered her question by putting one to her.

"Nay, Doña, cannot the man of Monterey be a true friend to his Texas brother, whether he dwell in San Antonio or no?"

"A subtle evasion, senor. Have a tamale," she replied.

With his tapering fingers he dexterously lifted the peppered meat from its bed of husks, ate of it, and then dipping his finger tips into the bowl of water beside his plate, he dried them upon his napkin before he vouchsafed a remark, and when he did so, it was adroitly to turn toward less dangerous ground. The Doña understood, and let the conversation drift whithersoever he chose to lead; but she told herself it was only the true Mexican of high caste who could handle and dispatch the tamale with such deftness and neatness as did the senor.

"And some day he will just as swiftly and deftly dispatch our beloved San Antonio out of the hands of the King's loyal subjects into a Mexican possession!" She felt it—as all highly organized women can feel those subtle, strange and unspoken things, and yet she loved him, although in her heart of hearts she knew he was a spy. The consciousness of this remained with her long hours after her guests had departed, and it came back to her the following morning

when she was awakened by the sound of a mocking-bird singing by her window casement; and yet she loved him, and had decked herself in finest array to please him. The rich brocade of her white and gold gown, with its pointed bodice, that revealed her rounded throat, had enhanced her dark beauty. She knew this, and had worn the dress for him; nay, the strings of gems, heirlooms from old Spain, that she had twined about her throat and bare arms, were to make herself more beautiful in his eyes; her hair, piled high upon her head, with loops over her tiny ears, held in its dark meshes the beautiful Castilian rose, and she had worn it for love's sake; her slippered feet were nimble and light, and her young blood was warm in her veins, for Love had crowned himself sovereign of her life.

She knew that a horrible death would be meted out to him should he ever be detected, and the thought chilled the blood in her veins. She feared Cortez, for whomsoever his baleful breath was blown upon was sure to die. The poisoned wine of the Sacrament, that had taken the life of the good old Padre Gonzalos, she well knew had come from the hand of Cortez; likewise had death overtaken the little Mexican tamale vendor, although his bloated body had been found in the river, where it was supposed he had been drowned while in bathing. She recalled the double tragedy out on Mendoza Hill; she thought of the beautiful young Spanish girl,

the old woman, and the demolished home which the superstitious villagers would not pass after nightfall—for they claimed it was haunted and that the spirits of the three dead Mendoza men stood nightly guard over the funeral pile of their old home.

She felt that once he was convinced he could never win her, or that her love was given elsewhere, he would adroitly find means to dispose likewise of her rather than leave a rival victor of the field. She feared his treachery, which moved stealthily, in the dark. She had caught the baleful light in his eyes and the sneer upon his lips the night before at the banquet table as Xamino responded to her father's toast. Had he read the telltale signs in her happy face? Did he know that they were lovers? or, Holy Mother! did he guess the truth as to Xamino? These thoughts played back and forth through her brain all the day following the night of the tournament ball. She could not ostracize him from her home, for she and her father were Royalists and the King's troops held the town. Should she do so her father's life would be in jeopardy, for it was known that he was not the bitterest of enemies of the Revolutionists; she must wait and cajole the enemy and arch traitor until Xamino was safe from all harm.

CHAPTER XIV

For some time Doña Arguella had been racking her brain for a suggestion as to what method she should pursue with Captain Cortez to cajole him into a more plastic mood, but the days slipped by and she was no nearer to solving the riddle than when it first came to her.

Down at the dingy, soot-covered barracks of the presidio the captain was drinking heavily and swearing like a mad pirate at every one who came near him. He lashed one of his peons with his riding whip until the lad fell unconscious at his feet. His offense had been trivial, but it was an opportunity for the volcanic rage of the captain to vent itself, and he could beat his own slave, for there was no one to interfere. He frequented the coffee-houses and other public places in the hope of meeting Axtel Xamino. When they did meet, he was to pick a quarrel with the Mexican, then his henchmen, who followed him about closely, were to murder the Mexican and then make good their escape.

Xamino was too well trained to danger and the sublety of the treacherous Spanish nature to allow the riata to fall about his neck easily. During his supposed capture by the rebels, and while he was known in the fighting ranks as Carlos Lopez, he had stolen back into the town

to procure medical aid for his wounded friend, and it was then he learned from other Mexicans of the tragedy out on Mendoza Hill, and of the captain seeking Norveta and her mother everywhere. These facts had given Xamino an insight into the captain's diabolical nature; and when he came to San Antonio again, as his true self, Axtel Xamino, clothed with power as the viceroy's plenipotentiary to the Governor of Texas, he remembered the captain's persecution of Hackett's friends.

He recognized him as the persecutor of Norveta Mendoza and her mother; also, he read his love and admiration for beautiful Carmaleta Arguella. The envoy went quietly about his business, wherever it called him, but he kept on the alert for a chance to avenge Norveta and her mother, and to take redress from the captain by force for his insult to the Doña in his presuming to admire and love her.

During these days he was often at the governor's home, where he frequently met Fairfax, the young Virginian who rode the last tilt with him in the tournament. The young Englishman had fallen desperately in love with the governor's pretty daughter and was paying assiduous court at the shrine of her beauty. He and Xamino were fast growing to be good friends since they had learned to know each other better. The handsome envoy smiled to himself as he saw the fair-haired Englishman shadowing the old general's daughter.

"It is so with them all," he told himself, as he watched the pretty tableau love was playing. "Something seems to grip them here," striking himself upon the breast as he continued his mental self-communion. "They say it is a madness for which emperors have been dethroned, and empires have fallen, and that a new light is born into the world, with which men who have the disease have never viewed things before; a deeper blue to the sky, a softer murmur in the waters; all nature speaks, and man listens and understands."

The memory of his thoughts lingered with him long after he had finished his interview with the governor, and they left him not until he found himself by the Doña's side, the gloaming gathering about them making all things look fantastical with its gray, softened touch. On the old piazza, with its tall pillars and beautiful Castilian roses, they sat talking; the voices of the fast-falling night were about them; and coming up from a gypsy camp on the river far below, could be heard the twang of guitars and the singing of wild border songs; nearer by, from the heart of a great live-oak tree, a mocking-bird was singing his mate to sleep; the odor of shrub and flower was borne on the soft night breeze, and the sound of a whippoorwill, calling from afar to his mate, was lost in the rushing waters of the river.

Xamino's arm was about her, and with head bending low he listened to her every word as

she told him of her great dread of the wicked captain. He waited until she had finished, and then, taking her face between his brown palms, he sought to kiss her fears away. "Carmaleta, my beautiful love, do not let your fears of this vile man cast a shadow before you; leave him to me; I, Xamino, who loves you better than his own life, will protect you from his treachery."

"It is not for myself that I fear him, Axtel; it is for you, you whom he hates so bitterly because he knows that I love you. Oh, Holy Mother, if I could but get you to understand!" There was a wail of woe in her voice as it hushed, and she bowed her head upon his arm, outstretched toward her, for her heart was heavy with forboding of approaching evil.

Bending his head low, he whispered softly in her ear, "Come out into the court with me, Carmaleta; I have something to tell you."

She lifted her head from his arm, and as she did so, he pressed a kiss upon her lips and the fair girlish face, then together they went out to where the pomegranate and palmetto trees were growing thickly and casting their shadows upon the ground by the light of the rising moon. He told her, as he had done so many times before, of the great love for her that filled his heart and life, and asked her to wed him, just as many other men before him had asked the woman they love, and as millions more would do thereafter. It was the play of human emotions, as

sweet and light as the footsteps of the shadows that flit over a field of tasseling corn.

"You shall come with me as my bride to Monterey, where our home shall be under the shade of the aloes; there we can be always together and our love will make the days long with golden happiness. Lift your face to mine, Doña, and tell me with your own sweet lips that you love me."

"With all my soul I love you, Axtel, and I pray the angels to protect you from the wicked hatred of Captain Cortez!"

Her face was upturned to his as she spoke, and, stooping, he kissed her the kiss of betrothal. Long they talked of the future, planning for the many happy days that stretched before them. Suddenly they were startled by a stealthy sound near their trysting place, as of a cautious footfall.

"Caramba!" hissed the startled lover, as he felt for the sheathed stiletto within the scarlet folds of his silken sash. Springing forward with the knife tightly gripped in his hand, his black eyes searched intently among the shadows of the shrubbery for the intruder. Only a mocking laugh, far away, sounded back to him. Doña Arguella heard the laugh, and her blood chilled from the hate that sounded in its tone; she recognized the diabolical mirth of Captain Cortez in the mocking notes.

Xamino returned to her. "Some spy from among Gutierrez's band is lurking about the

place!" said he, as he sheathed his knife and adjusted his sash.

"Knowest thou not from whom that laugh cometh, Xamino? I have heard it before; there is no other like it for cruelty. Captain Cortez has been so close to us to-night that he might have slain both of us, but he leaves that to be done when he shall have chosen the way it is to be done."

Xamino snatched her to his bosom and kissed her face and hands; they were cold as of some being who had suffered a twinge of paralysis. His warm caresses wakened her from the torpor of fear that had seized her, and in a sharp note of inquiry he said "Diabol! Cortez, indeed, Doña, do you think I am a man of wax, to stand and let any one hew me down? I do not fear Captain Cortez; he is a bully who seeks to frighten old women and young girls. Let him seek to steal upon me if he likes best that mode of attack. I know the haunts and the habits of the panther and cougar, and have slain them while they were panting to lap my blood. To vanquish a foe like that is worth the steel in a man's knife and just so shall I hunt the trail of Cortez. I hate him for the miserable spawn to which he belongs, for it was from such as he that the first shadow came into my life by the murder of my father and the breaking of my young mother's heart because they loved as you and I now love, my beautiful one. Cortez will not find

me off guard, as they found my poor young father the night he was murdered."

They had returned to the piazza, and as they sat there in the moonlight he told her the sad story of his young mother and her murdered lover, to whom she had been truly wed by the good old padre at the mission. He told her all the agony he suffered when he had been shown the room where his mother was kept a prisoner until she had given birth to her babe and then died; he told her of the bitter hatred that rose up in his heart when he heard the story of their cruel death, and it was then that Doña Arguella understood why he hated the Spaniards so deeply. She put her arms about his neck, drew his head down until it rested upon her shoulder, and with her soft little hand she touched his cheek lovingly and lightly, as a young mother touches her first born. The extreme sorrow and loneliness of his young life lent a sanctity to her love it had not known before. While they sat thus, Xamino heard the cry of a night owl. He lifted his head to listen better, and heard it again. He could not mistake; it was Big Wolf's call. He answered back with the call of the whippoorwill. Immediately came again the cry of the night owl. Doña did not understand; she only thought it some freakish notion that possessed this child of nature whom she loved so dearly. Soon Xamino rose to go, and as he parted from her he urged her to sleep soundly and have no more fears. She clung to him, and

in pleading tones besought him not to go. She feared Cortez; his mocking laugh seemed to her to linger still about the place. Kissing her tenderly, he sprang over the balustrade of the piazza, and was soon lost to view beneath the dense shadow of the live-oaks growing in the grounds.

Xamino's eyes were searching among the shadows as he moved along, for he knew that Big Wolf was near by and that the Indian's appearance meant trouble ahead for some one. He had not gone far from the gates that enclosed the old Don's private grounds when the half-nude form of the redskin appeared in the road before him. Lifting his shoulders and vigorously shaking his great bulk of dusky muscle, the Indian gave vent to the expressions common with him when wanting to fight.

"Boo-er-rer-ooh-boo—ugh—booh! Fightin' man hunt little brave; um slip—slip," and throwing himself to the ground he began crawling as though imitating the movement of some wild animal creeping upon its prey. With the agile motion of the panther, he crept swiftly along until he reached Xamino's feet, then suddenly springing erect, he threw his hand aloft, and in his clutch he held a long knife which glittered in the rays of the moon. The big, brown face was distorted with a murderous look, as he peered searchingly at Xamino, their brows almost touching. The Mexican watched his movements with no thought of fear, for he was

accustomed to the Indian's talking by signs, and knew that he was trying to make himself understood in regard to some imminent danger which, in some way, Xamino felt, must concern himself.

Big Wolf lowered the knife as suddenly as he had lifted it, and pointed with the blade toward the presidio. Xamino understood, and reaching forth his hand he patted the big brown arm with a gentle touch. A jumble of Indian and Mexican jargon followed for a few moments between the two, and then they separated, Big Wolf drawing back into the shadow of the live-oaks from whence he had come, and Xamino proceeding upon his way to his hotel, every nerve on the alert for any lurking danger along his way

CHAPTER XV

The Montezuma Hotel, which stood within the shadow of the governor's house, was the favorite abiding place of Xamino when in San Antonio, rather than the rooms offered him at the Alcalde's home. Its threshold was worn and hacked, and the facade was weather-stained and battle-scarred, for the hostelry had done good service since the first settling of the French and Spanish emigrants of the town. It was not only the oldest but the best tavern in the place, and its walls had known many strange things, strange and terrible, for it had been a favorite with Royalists and Revolutionists alike.

It was a full and a half story, built of hewn logs, and had been added to at different times, as the years passed by, until it had become a rambling, ill-shaped but commodious place. An outer coating of stucco, put on adobe fashion, had fallen away in many places, and gave it a scarred, dilapidated air; but the beds, for the most part, were clean and the rooms airy and cool in summer. The culinary was a mongrel hatch to suit the palate of the American, Mexican, and Spaniard alike, for the place was cosmopolitan in its gathering of guests; its bar boasted pulque and pure corn oil; and its guests ate, drank, slept, paid their bills in Spanish

coin, and then did what they pleased. Buccaneers and freebooters from the port of Anahuac, at the head of Galveston Bay, whose waters floated the dark crafts of Lafitte, the pirate, made this their stopping place; and Mexican and American drovers, who chased and gathered in cavayards, wild mustang ponies, for the Louisiana and San Antonio markets, drank and ate at the tavern's genial board, and played at the games of rouge-et-noir and trente-et-quarante, regardless of the lengthening hours running the days and nights into one. But at the little tavern there was being played a much deeper game than that of rouge-et-noir or faro. Xamino had his reason for stopping at the place, for it was here that he could more easily receive and send messages to the outlawed Revolutionist leaders.

As he entered the hotel after his parting with Big Wolf near the old Spaniard's home, he felt himself rudely jostled aside by the protruding elbow of a bulky, dark-bearded Spaniard, in blue hunting shirt, high boots, and short trousers of undressed deer skin. He threw his hand to his dirk knife in his belt, and let loose a volley of oaths at being run into.

"Pardon, senor," replied Xamino, as he stepped aside and passed on into the bar-room, not forgetting to keep watch of the Spaniard who, he felt, was following him.

Xamino passed through the straggling crowd about the bar, and entered the gambling room.

He saw Captain Cortez, in company with three rough-looking unkempt Spaniards, seated at the faro table, apparently absorbed in the game before him. As Xamino passed close to the table, Cortez looked up, and the envoy met the baleful glare of hate in his blood-shot eyes with cool indifference, paused for a moment and carelessly scanned the crowd seated at the different gambling tables. But in truth he was on the alert for Cortez to make some overture for an attack, and was also on the watch for the Spaniard he had met at the threshold, who advanced and was now standing by the table where Captain Cortez and his friends were playing cards. Finding that no one accosted him, Xamino turned away, and as he did so he saw Fairfax, the Virginian, and a couple of American drovers, seated at a card table at the further end of the room. Xamino walked over to the table where the three men sat playing. Fairfax greeted him with friendship and extended to him an invitation to join in the game.

"The other senors wish it too?" questioned Xamino, as he turned toward the drovers. "You bet, scout, slip into the game," they said, and made room for him at the table, Xamino seating himself where he could have full view of all that was going on in the room. He had not been long in the game with his American friends when he saw more drinks ordered for Cortez's table; but he played on, quietly keeping watch on the game before him, and likewise upon Cortez and

his partners, ruffians like many of the others present, who had remained in town for a week's sport after the tournament and the bull fight, members of Lafitte's band, whose happy hunting ground was the Spanish Main, off Bolivar Point, and burying their treasures in the deep sand, had left their low, rakish crafts sheltered in the deep channel, which was maintained by the natural scour of the tides, to indulge in a fortnight's reveling at old San Antonio, above the forks of the rivers.

Hardly had Xamino joined in the game at Fairfax's table, when Big Wolf entered the hotel bar-room, with a haunch of venison upon his shoulder, which he tendered the tavern keeper as a gift of friendship. With a genial grin, the landlord poured a glass of whisky and handed it to the Indian, in exchange for the venison.

Big Wolf gulped the whisky down and moved back from the bar. He looked all about the room and then appeared for a moment at the door of the gambling room. Only for a moment, but long enough to see Xamino's face beneath the rim of his sombrero, as he sat among the Americans at the card table, then he paused just outside the door-way. Resting his back against the wall, and with arms crossed over his chest, he quietly kept watch upon Cortez and his companions, whose every move was visible to him through the open door, while those seeing him standing thus thought him to be watching the crowd and the gambling, with no intent to harm

any one. Xamino was engaged in shuffling and dealing the cards for another game, when the bulky Spaniard who had accosted him at the doorway, approached Fairfax's table, and, with abusive epithets directed toward Xamino for cowardice, sought to provoke a quarrel. Xamino knew it was but the signal for the fight to begin, and that the hirelings of Cortez would seek him, but it brought a thrill of satisfaction to his soul as he thought of seeing the hated Spanish blood flow, though his own life be the forfeit. Hardly had the insult been given, when one of the drovers sprang to his feet, and with his heavy wooden chair floored the intruder upon his card game. A volley of oaths, hisses, and the clashing of knives instantly followed, the half-intoxicated crowd all joining in the melee. Cortez pushed the two men forward with the admonition, "Do your work well, senors, and the gold is yours!" Then lifting his voice above that of the yelling crowd, he cried out, "The Mexican is a spy! He is here to seek news for the revolutionist camps! Down with the traitor!"

The noise in the gambling-room had attracted the crowd in the front part of the tavern, who came in a rush to the scene, all eager to take a hand in the fight, and with them came Big Wolf.

There was an instant's pause at the sound of Cortez's voice, only for an instant, and then the wily captain saw the enraged crowd closing in on Xamino and the three Americans who had

backed themselves against the wall, and with their long-bladed hunting knives and holsters were defending themselves from the drunken Spaniards, in whom the lust for blood had been aroused. The wily captain waited until he saw the enraged mob closing in upon the man he hated, and then, amidst the upsetting of the tables and wooden stools, he made his exit through the nearest door, feeling sure that his enemy would be removed out of his way, with such terrible odds against him, and at the same time making sure of his own safety. The lights had been overturned, and only a dim tallow dip, ensconced in a niche in the wall, was left to feebly light the room, throwing its flickering flame over the surging crowd of drunken, heavily armed men.

Cool, sagacious, and self-collected, Xamino fought with deadly aim, his long steel blade bringing the death cry from every antagonist who assailed him, as also did Fairfax and the herdsmen. The Mexican kept an eager watch by the dim light of the tallow candle for the face of his hated enemy, but the captain was safe beyond harm's way. In vain did the crowd seek to rout Fairfax and his party from the shelter of the darkened corner, but the wall served as a barricade of protection to their backs from the sly Spaniards' sneaking knives. Just as Xamino was engaged in a fierce battle with two antagonists, he saw a third one bearing down upon him, holding his long dirk poised in mid air, ready

to strike. As he realized the odds were turning against him, he heard a savage growl, and at the same instant Big Wolf sheathed his knife in the breast of the oncoming assailant. The Indian jerked his knife back from the breast of his reeling victim, sprang across the intervening space and, with his back to the wall, stood beside "Little Brave," facing the now fast thinning crowd. One of the herdsmen had fallen from a knife thrust in the side, but the other one and Fairfax were yet unharmed, and with the table for a barricade to protect their wounded friend, beat back their assailants.

The scene was appalling when the fight was over, for the floor was covered with blood, and half a score of men lay dead, while several were severely wounded. Fairfax urged Xamino to come with him away from the hotel, but the Mexican doggedly refused to be influenced by the American in quitting his place of abode. There was a gruesome funeral procession the following day, but the incident was soon forgotten by the occurrence of others of similar nature, each one crowding the other out of mind. So frequently did these desperate fights and murders about the gambling tables of San Antonio occur during these days that but little heed was given them. Royalty was making her last desperate struggle to maintain her own under the King's crown, but crowds of filibustering Americans and Mexican revolutionists were slowly obliterating the Spanish element, save the conscript

soldiery from Spain and the last remaining homes of the old-time, landed Spanish aristocracy, a society which preserved the traditions of Spanish luxury and hospitality. Through the governor, Xamino succeeded in awakening a renewed interest in the gold mines, and it was at this time that the famous old San Saba gold mines were most extensively worked. Many of the soldiery deserted from the presidio to seek the dark, shadowy arroyos, in quest of the glittering metal, some perishing in the mines, and others, more successful in their daring venture, stealing aboard the Spanish galleons in the waters of the Gulf, and returning to Old Spain with their coveted gold.

Before the arrival of the time for Xamino's recall to the City of Mexico, he had forwarded his resignation of the post as special envoy, and, like Caesar, "with that love for the light that lies in woman's eyes," he spent the days by the side of his fair young wife, within the sanctuary of their own home, far away in the picturesque old town of Monterey.

The wickedly handsome Cortez, foiled in his effort to destroy his rival, who had won the prize for which he was risking so much, gave his life over to debauchery, revelry, and gambling. He became imbued with the lust for gold, like many around him, and would absent himself from the fort on long rambles up and down the shallow ravines, and sometimes reaching out to the darkening arroyos.

While indulging in one of his solitary prospecting tours, keeping ever on the alert for some stray band of guerrillas, he spied the form of a man walking cautiously through the low, scrub growth of chaparral growing near the brink of the ravine which he himself was ascending. Seeing that he had not been discovered, he stepped behind a tree, and proceeded to watch the man's movements. He saw him turn into the ravine, and knew the path or trail he was following would lead him directly his way. He was right; the man passed so close to his hiding place that he could have touched the butt of his rifle. The turning of a loose stone under the man's foot careened him in his course and as he reeled, staggering and half falling, he lost his hold upon his rifle, and from the wide pocket on the breast of the rough hunting shirt fell a shower of golden nuggets.

When he reached for his rifle, and sought to raise himself, he found the muzzle of a gun looking him in the face. The Spanish officer was bending over him with a murderous expression in his baleful eyes. The man left his gun lying where it fell, but reached for his nuggets of gold.

"Hold!" commanded the officer, in subdued but decisive tones, and again the man remained passive. "Where did you get these?" The man kicked the dry leaves and rattled the small stones, indicating that he had found them upon the surface. "You lie! This is the King's gold

you are stealing. Tell me where you found it, and I will see that you are not imprisoned for the theft."

The man turned a defiant face toward his captor, exulting in the knowledge that his secret was his own and no one could wrest it from him.

"Speak up, or by the blood of the Holy Mother, I will riddle your carcass! You are stealing from the Pope and from the Crown. Show me the lead where these were found or, as a loyal subject of His Majesty, I shall slay you for the outrage."

"To hell with the Pope and the Crown! It is mine and no man shall take it from me," the man replied, and reaching for his hunting knife he sought to spring to his feet and defend himself, but a swift-speeding bullet from the officer's gun struck him in the breast and he fell once again to the ground, but this time it was with a death groan. Stooping over his victim, the officer picked up the bright golden nuggets, muttering as he did so, "I was a fool to slay him; the secret dies with him!" A covetous light shone in his face as he pocketed the specimens and looked through his victim's clothes for more, or better still for some chart or map that might lead him to the discovery of the mine. Finding nothing he gave the body, now stiffening in death, a kick with the toe of his boot, and, turning, walked back toward the presidio. An hour later a half-nude Indian passed down the same ravine and stumbled over the form that lay

across the trail. He drew back a step, then quickly advancing examined the face of the dead man. Then he suddenly stood erect, his motions swift but noiseless. He had recognized the dead man, for they had hunted through the woods and went trapping upon the river together. The dead man was San Pedro Cotulla, the old man who lived with his wife in the grove by the "gushing waters," and the Indian was Big Wolf, who started immediately upon the trail of the one who had slain his old comrade. So close was he at times upon the heels of Cortez that the grass blades, bending beneath his tread, were just lifting their heads as he passed. The blood surged and throbbed in the Indian's neck veins as he eagerly hastened forward to catch his prey; but the wily captain got safely within the Spanish lines.

"This time miss 'em, some day git 'em," Big Wolf said to himself as he sat alone in his hut roasting his meat and corn pone in the red-hot embers.

Cortez had halted on his way from the scene of his crime to examine a ledge of rock which held some traces of mineral. He had barely finished and passed on his way, when Big Wolf came upon his trail. When the officer heard the crackling of the dry undergrowth, he turned quickly to look back over the way he had come. Like a shadow, Big Wolf had flitted behind a tree, but in that brief moment he had caught sight of the Spaniard's face and recognized him.

He had followed the trail closely since first taking it up beside the body of the murdered man, and he knew he was on the right track, and he felt, as he recognized the man he was trailing, that now he would be able to settle a double grudge, for the man he was following was the same he had caught tracking "Little Brave," the same for whom he and Xamino had searched among the dead and wounded in the gambling room of the Montezuma Hotel.

Cortez had not seen the Indian flit behind the tree, but he felt a queer, creepy sensation sweep over him as he turned and pursued his course. He had not gone far when he felt, by some power of intuition, that he was being tracked; a chill crept through the blood in his veins and he quickened his steps. Even the rustling of the dry leaves beneath his feet seemed an ominous sound to his strained and listening ear. Occasionally he cast a furtive glance over his shoulder. When within sight of the fort he felt more secure, but Big Wolf, fearing he was about to lose his prey, pressed eagerly forward. In one of his backward glances Cortez caught sight of the flitting shadow, for the night shades were beginning to gather. Rather than turn and fire his gun in the face of his pursuer, he ran swiftly in the direction of the fort. Big Wolf slackened his speed, as he saw they were near the picket lines of the Spanish troops, and turning away, was soon lost in the thick shadow of the woods,

making his way toward the home of the man who lay dead far up in the lonely ravine.

He found the old Senora Cotulla, and told her where San Pedros lay dead, with a bullet in his heart, far up in the dry bed of the ravine. The old senora fell ill the same day she heard of her great loss, but before she lost consciousness she told Big Wolf the location of the mine, if he would, in exchange for the gift, go up in the gulch and bury the body of her dead, that the wild beasts infesting the woods might not devour the body.

The Indian was true to his word, but when he went back in search of the body he found only a few fragments left. These he gathered up, and carrying them to a cave near by, he placed them within, and then rolled a stone before the opening, thus closing the mouth of the cave.

After Captain Cortez felt his timidity vanish and had regained his courage, he returned to the scene of his crime to search for the lead to the mine, from whence came the yellow nuggets which he carried as a talisman. Big Wolf likewise hunted the same locality. When his hand was just about to grasp the coveted gold, Cortez found himself suddenly confronted by a huge Indian, who seemed to have risen up directly out of the ground. The wrath of an angered Mars shone in the face of the Indian as he obstructed the Spaniard's way.

"Down, you Indian dog, and let me pass!" commanded the imperious officer, unsheathing

his short sword as he spoke. Big Wolf's long hunting knife flashed into sight instantly, and he gave his assailant no time to retreat. Almost without a moment's warning the two men closed in deadly combat, their bodies swaying as they each struggled for the victory. The lithe, sinewy form of the Spaniard, with his military knowledge of handling the short sword, made him no mean antagonist for the bronze Hercules with whom he was struggling.

Alone, in the heart of the woods, they fought the bitter fight out to the death, and when it was finished, Big Wolf stood erect, with an exultant smile upon his lips and in his hand the bleeding scalp of Antone Cortez, the scion of a house of Spanish nobles. The carcass was left to rot where it had fallen, or to be devoured by the wild beasts that prowled through the woods. The old Senora Cotulla lived to see the bloody scalp of the fiend who had murdered her old mate, and then she turned her face from the world, making no struggle against death, which soon released her spirit from its worn, weary old body. She was buried by Big Wolf's request under a noble live-oak, near one of the big springs which had been the pride of old San Pedro. The priest who had administered to her the last rites of the Church, and Big Wolf, were the only mourners, the Indian carving the sign of the crucifix upon the bark of the tree with his hunting knife. The old cabin among the trees was closed, its meager furnishings go-

ing to the priest for his services and care for the dead. The following day Big Wolf, after stamping out the fire on the hearth of his old mud hut, took his way across the river, then turned his face toward Hackett's hacienda on the Nueces River. Some days later he made his appearance at the ranch and was accorded a glad welcome by both Hackett and his wife. Changes had visited them since Big Wolf's last visit to their home. The fiery spirit of old Emanuella Mendoza had been quenched in death; and playing about Norveta's feet and clinging to her skirts was a tiny little girl baby, with black eyes and silken black locks, bearing the same name as her old ancestress who slept beneath the big pecan tree in the garden near the house.

With pride Big Wolf showed the scalp of Cortez to Hackett and his wife. Norveta came forward and looked upon the ghastly trophy, a feeling of awe and repugnance filling her soul. It was the same silky, slightly wavy black hair. A lock that had not been matted with blood lifted itself at the touch of the breeze, and seemed to speak to her, as if beckoning her in greeting. She drew back, horrified at the sight. "And yet," she wondered, "after all, might he not have found pardon to some degree for his crimes, and may not death have cleansed him of much of his wrongdoing while on earth?"

Hackett held her closer in his arms as she told him, when they were alone, of the horror

that filled her soul at the sight of the ghastly thing that Big Wolf carried at his belt. He promised her the sight should annoy her no longer, and seeking the Indian, who sat beneath the shade of the big trees in the yard, playing with the little mistress of the hacienda, Hackett asked him for the gruesome object that was giving his wife so much misery. Together they buried the trophy in an out of the way spot, and thus removed for all time all trace of the body of Antone Cortez. The Indian was willing, for he realized the Great Spirit now held their old enemy, and he could no longer roam the earth to do them bodily harm.

Big Wolf did not return to San Antonio, but made his home at Hackett's ranch, going at times to visit the tribes of Indians who were friendly to the "Big Sachem." He taught them the rites of the Roman Catholic religion, and the meaning of the crucifix at his neck, which he no longer disgraced by carrying the scalps of victims at his belt.

In Mexico the fire of the revolution was smouldering and breaking into a flame in many places. The city of Monterey was one of the northern strongholds, and our old friend Axtel Xamino had been chosen as one of their commandants.

A dashing young lieutenant-colonel, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna, had left the Spanish army and joined hands with Iturbide in the South. He was about five feet five inches in height, of

spare form, and dark complexioned; his manners were pleasing and insinuating when he chose to make them so, and his force of character was manifested in his speech and gestures. In habits and tastes he was a thorough Mexican, his favorite amusements cock-fighting and card-playing. He was full of restless energy and ambition, and ofttimes the exuberance of his animal spirits found vent in forms of dissipation that gave promise of low, notorious personal vices for the man when he had grown older. His ambition made him in later life one of the most remarkable figures that ever appeared in the history of the American continent.

CHAPTER XVI

Under the blaze of the summer sun and the rattling sleet of the winter blizzards, the old town above the forks of the rivers droned away the passing years, which marked themselves with much of the same vicissitudes that had characterized the place since its first founding as a Spanish settlement. Its military, maintained for the protection of the missions of the Franciscan friars that had been erected from time to time along the valley of the San Antonio river, was a perpetual drain on the old mother country; the mineral riches had done more for the interior, and northwestern district, than for the coast countries; civilization in Bexar had retrograded rather than advanced, until it merely constituted an outlying and rural province of Mexico. The American settlements in Nacogdoches had been dominated by a lawless element of criminal refugees, who had found an Alsatia in the neutral ground beyond the Sabine River lying between the boundaries of the United States and Mexico. It was a favorite retreat for the desperate outlaws of the Southwest, for once beyond the muddy waters of the Sabine, they were safe from all molestation, let their crime be ever so heinous.

The rich fields in the broad valley, flowered

with tall maize, were overgrown with rank grass and mesquite bushes. The irrigating ditches were choked with gathering accretions and no longer served the purpose of fertilizing the beautiful valley. The immense crucifix surmounting the old church of San Fernando, between the Main and Military Plazas, reared its head aloft, distinctly outlined against the intensely blue sky. Across the river, about three-fourths of a mile away, vividly outlined by the Italian-like sky, could also be seen the crucifix surmounting the Mission of San Antonio de Valges, or the Alamo, with its church, convent, and walled inclosure. These, with the valley missions that were fast falling into a state of decay, were almost all that the fragmentary Spanish army could now be said to have need of defending. All other Spanish interests were decidedly on the decline. The inhabitants were almost altogether Mexicans, with a few American traders who dealt in peltry, which they gave in exchange for supplies, brought by the caravans from New Orleans or by the way of Nacogdoches. The savage attacks of the Comanches and Apaches had driven the friars from their missions in the valley to seek safety in Mexico, but they professed a nominal friendship for the people in the town, and frequented the place for trade, conducting themselves with a barbaric insolence, invading houses and helping themselves to whatever they fancied, and finding no resistance from the inmates.

With the settling of Austin's colony, between the Brazos and Colorado rivers,—an uninhabited wilderness,—began the real growth and prosperity of the American element of the provinces, for these people were sturdy and honest, the best representatives of the hardy adventurers who have led the van of civilization.

In character, the settlers of Austin's colony were of a much higher type than the lawless element in the eastern section, which was known as the old Nacogdoches colony. Many of the settlers in Austin's colony had traveled in ox-wagons a thousand or fifteen hundred miles from beyond the Mississippi River, amid all the perils and hardships of the wilderness, crossing great tracts of forest and prairie, with no road or trail to mark the way, and building rafts to carry their teams over the swollen streams, and halting for a season to raise a crop of corn. Children were born in the camps, and the dead were buried by the roadside. The ready rifle brought game to the camp pot at every halting place. They heeded not the cold or the heat, for they made no impression upon their hardened frames; and a rough and ready surgery cared for the accidents to flesh and limb. Some perished, and their sad story was left to be told by the blood-stained ashes of the extinguished camp fire, and the plundered wagons showed where some overpowering band of savages had exterminated the wanderers. But the survivors were of a strong, hardened type of man-

hood, brought to the perfection of courage, helpfulness, and endurance by their many trials and perils, brave conquerors of the wilderness, and worthy founders of great states. The concession from Mexico to Stephen F. Austin was made for the settlement of three hundred families, on condition of their professing the Roman Catholic religion and promising fidelity to the Spanish government. The grants included 640 acres of land for each head of a family or single man, to each wife were given 320 acres, to each child 160 acres, and 80 acres for each slave. They fought the Indians, built cabins of hewn logs, cleared the soil and planted their crops. They were adventurous in spirit, with an irresistible love for the life in the wilderness, and the delight of vigorous achievement. Their blood was warm and flashed easily into combat, but they were kind, hospitable and honest and thoroughly manly; the cowardly vices of fashionable society found no place among them. Austin was the supreme authority among them, both judge and commandant, and ruled the colony with fatherly kindness, sagacity, and justice, like a patriarch of old.

While at work, the colonists kept guard against the Indians, who roamed about seeking what stock they could steal, and at times making midnight attacks upon cabins, or murdering and scalping some solitary traveler or hunter. A vessel laden with supplies had been cast away, another had been grounded and plundered, its

crew massacred by a tribe of ferocious coast Indians. It was then that the settlers learned the meaning of real privation. They were obliged to subsist mainly upon wild game, such as deer, bear, and antelope. Their seed corn had to be imported from the United States, or purchased at San Antonio, where it was very scarce and dear, for the beautiful fields of maize that once had been wont to bloom and mature along the green valleys, grew no more. The women, as well as the men of the settlements, were clothed in deer-skin garments, and in many instances a stray pack-peddler with a few yards of calico had been known to receive fabulous prices for his goods, ofttimes selling at one dollar per yard. The men built cabins and made clearings, cutting down trees and canebrakes, and in the blackened fields, after the burning of the brush, they made holes with sharpened sticks to plant their corn. The colony continued to increase, and was undisturbed by the Mexican government for a number of years. The old viceroy, who had so bitterly opposed the advent of Americans, had passed away, and a new one reigned in his stead. Governor Martinez, of San Antonio, who had so coldly received the father of Stephen F. Austin, had shown himself more kind and considerate of the son. Through the intercession of Baron de Bastrop, a Prussian officer who had served under Frederick the Great, and who was then serving in the Spanish army, stationed with

headquarters at San Antonio, Governor Martinez was influenced into the friendly recognition of Austin's colony. For six years it was left free from all taxation. The settlers had but to fight the Indians, clear the wilderness and plough up the prairies, look after their seed-time and harvest, and guard their cabin homes.

The beautiful valley of the Nueces River attracted others as it had attracted our old friend Theodore Hackett, and as the different agricultural colonies were founded under grants of land from the Mexican government, new-comers took up their abode in Hackett's vicinity. The Irish colony of McMullin and McGloire became the strongest and remained permanent. Others came but lasted only for a short time, succumbing to the savage attacks of roving bands of Comanche Indians, or pilfering squads of renegade Mexicans. The different agricultural colonies carried on a friendly exchange of barter and trade. No man took another's note in their dealings, the verbal promise of payment being considered sufficient. All transactions were conducted on a warranted trust in local integrity. Hospitality was more than an obligation; it was impulsive and spontaneous. "The latch-string hangs out" was a fact of common life among the settlers, and has grown since into a proverb. Hackett extended a friendly welcome to the settlers in the colonies north of his hacienda, and was helpful to them in the capturing and domesticating of the wild cattle and horses

of the open range. It was known among them that he had a powerful influence over the Indians, who were many times induced by him to cease their depredations among the settlers and upon their property, and the "Big Sachem" grew to be as well loved among the colonists as among the Indians.

There was a geniality among the members of the Irish colonies that relieved the dreariness of their privations when first establishing themselves, and not infrequently they would ride many miles from their homes to some social gathering. The American adventurers of San Antonio had been drawn more to the Irish colonies, through their genial comradeship, than to that of Austin, and frequently intermarriages occurred between them. Long since our old friend, Allan Fairfax, had given up his suit for the dark eyed senorita, the Governor's daughter, to wed a bonnie faced Irish lassie. He had founded a peltry exchange on Soledad street, and refused to be routed from his position by the unfriendly feeling against Americans then existing in San Antonio. In one of his trips to the western colonies, to solicit their trade, and to purchase pelts for the San Antonio market, he first met Malinda Shackleford, who afterwards became his bride. He had finished trading with the settlers in the McGloire colony to the south, and had turned his attention to the McMullin, or north settlements. He was to hold his headquarters at the home of Ben

Shackleford, and as he had ridden hard for thirty hours or more, his horse was fagged and he himself was tired out when he at last reached the place. As he rode up to the front fence he was cordially invited to alight. His horse was staked out to feed on the prairie grass, and the visitor sat down to exchange the news with his host. The coffee-mill was set going, and the hopper in the hollowed log to grinding the corn. Fairfax could hear the movements of the women as they prepared the evening meal in the lean-to kitchen adjoining the cabin. He smelt the odor of the venison as it was broiling, and the scent whetted his appetite anew. After the evening meal and pipe, the visitor stretched himself out on a buffalo robe upon the floor and slept the sleep of health and fatigue. He rose with the sun the next morning, and while the women were cooking breakfast, he went with his host to look after his horse. He had attended to his horse and was returning to the house, when, just as he was turning the corner of the double log cabin, he came face to face with a beautiful girl of not more than sixteen. The girl was swinging a milk pail in her hand, and her sunbonnet had fallen back from her yellow hair, shining golden in the morning sun. The face revealed was strong, brave, and kind, with just a touch of pride, and a brave, clear glance met him from the depths of her blue eyes. In her manner there was coupled a shy reserve and fearless trust. She seemed endowed with a

pure-heartedness that could awaken reverence and rebuke impurity, as with the vision of God. She nodded her golden head, put up her hand to readjust her sunbonnet, and in a half friendly tone said "Good mornin'," seeking to pass him as he stood barring the way.

"Howdy!" replied Fairfax, doffing his hat with true gallantry as he spoke, but making no effort to clear the way. "Couldn't two go on the errand where that pail is taking you?" he questioned, as he looked smilingly into Malinda's face.

"Sure, moi faith, if it pl'ased ye would be to go!" she replied, and with alacrity Fairfax took the milk pail and turned his steps in the direction of the cow-pen, charmed with the bright face beside him.

With great dexterity Malinda went about her work, and soon the pails were foaming to the brim with the fresh, new milk. The calves were separated from their mothers and fastened in their paddock, and the cows were driven out of the gate to feed over the range until nightfall. When the gates were all made secure, Malinda took up the milk pail and started for the house, but Fairfax immediately relieved her of her burden, and together they walked back to the house. Breakfast over, Fairfax set about his work, but all day the sweet face of Malinda Shackleford was before him. He liked the clear, level gaze from her pretty blue eyes, her bright, cheerful good nature and strong helpfulness.

He saw a great deal of her during his stay, and when he came again it was to renew their friendship, which culminated in his taking her away as his bride, to live with him in the sleepy old town of San Antonio.

CHAPTER XVII

With the sweeping of the years a new republic has been born; Mexico has torn herself from the thraldom of Spanish rule, and the senors of the bush-range and now the dictators of the new government. Xamino has seen his dream realized, for Iturbide has taken the throne. By the constitution which made Mexico a republic, the territory of Texas was united with the province of Coahuila, under the title of "The State of Texas and Coahuila," and the capital established at Saltillo, five hundred miles from the Texas colony. The two provinces had nothing in common, the one being inhabited by a Mexican and the other by an American population. The government of the State was entirely in the hands of the Mexicans, the Texan representatives in the provincial assembly being limited to two. This, coupled with the signs of a growing spirit of interference on the part of the Mexican government, caused a feeling of uneasiness and distrust.

A proposition which was made during the administration of President Adams of the United States, to purchase the territory, deepened the jealousy of the Mexican government in regard to the American occupation of Texas. The new republic was unstable, and petty jealousies were

continually arising among the new rulers. The head of Santa Anna was continually appearing above the troubled waters of Mexican politics. He had organized two revolts, one to overthrow Iturbide, and the other to depose his successor, President Pedraza, and he had defeated and captured a division of Spanish troops under General Baradas, who had landed at Tampico for the purpose of repossessing the country for the King.

From the eminence of his position as Brigadier-General and Commandant of Vera Cruz, he made the lash of his political whip felt all over the republic. Not only had he deposed Iturbide and Pedraza, but he outmaneuvered Bustamenta, who had usurped the presidency, and when he had him in his power he banished him from the republic. At last, when he succeeded in having himself elected to the presidency, he abolished the Congress, and virtually made himself dictator, and arrogated to himself the title of the "Napoleon of the West."

The State of Coahuila and Texas had passed a law in the legislature forbidding the further settlement of American colonists. This, with the great inconvenience and lack of organization resulting from the unfavorable union of the two provinces, influenced the colonists in Texas to demand the organization of Texas into a State by herself. They elected delegates to a convention for this purpose, and thus, by the meeting of the delegates at the town of San

Filipe, the first outbreak occurred that was to terminate eventually in the independence of Texas. All directions and orders to the colonists were issued from San Filipe by the committee of delegates in waiting there, and when it became known among them that President Santa Anna rejected their constitution, they began forming in small companies for self protection, for the Indians were murdering many of the settlers, and the Mexican government was extending to them no protection whatsoever.

When the news reached the capital, through the Governor of Coahuila, that the colonists were forming into bands and arming themselves, orders were sent out by Santa Anna for the general disarmament of the Texans. Often has the bitter story been told of the desperate and bloody struggle of the colonists against the despotic tyranny of President Santa Anna in their fight for freedom and independence. Every child born on Texas soil, with one drop of the old constitution blood in its veins, will cease its merriment and listen with bated breath when it hears from its mother's lips the story of the storming of the Alamo. The doleful memory of that sad crusade makes the lips of the matured whiten and be tighter drawn, and causes the slow, bitter tear of regret to descend upon the furrowed cheek of old age.

While sedition and confusion reigned among the military and governmental organizations in Texas, Santa Anna had been consolidating the

power in Mexico. State legislatures had been abolished by the new constitution, and only the form of a federal government remained, with its department council and governors of provinces appointed by the president, who was the supreme authority and absolute dictator in all but the name. The Republican Party was crushed, and the majority of the Mexican people, seeing their liberties taken from them, submitted to the heel of tyranny pressing upon their necks, as perforce there was no help for the evil. Feeling himself conqueror of Mexico, Santa Anna began mobilizing his troops at San Louis Potosi, preparing for the subjugation of Texas, where alone his rule was resisted. General Cos was then besieged in San Antonio, and it was early in December when the first brigade, under the command of General Sesma, was sent to his relief. The remainder of the forces, with the cavalry and artillery, were stationed at Saltillo, and Santa Anna took the command in person. The troops were the best in the Mexican army—disciplined veterans, so far as their irregular system of service could render them. Santa Anna moved his army of four thousand men from Saltillo to Monclova. Leaving his army at this point, and accompanied by a cavalry escort, he visited the camps of General Sesma and General Cos, the latter having retreated from San Antonio, under the fire of the Texans, and when found by General Sesma's brigade, he was resting on the Rio Grande. Santa Anna consoli-

dated his entire army under Cos and Sesma at Monclova, where it numbered between six and seven thousand men, followed, in accordance with the Mexican custom, by a great crowd of women, wives of the soldiers, and many other camp followers, which added great difficulty and distress to the moving of the Mexican army across the sandy desert wastes between Monclova and San Antonio. But the imperious and dominant will of Santa Anna brought the advance guard before San Antonio on the 22d of February. The Texans were taken by surprise. Heedless of the necessity of scouting and reconnoitering for the enemy, they had suffered them to steal up to their very doors without any warning. The garrison hastily retreated across the river to the Alamo, and as they swept across the plain they hastily gathered up some thirty or forty beef cattle and drove them into the plaza of the fortress, where Colonel Travis was in command. He had been as careless about his supply of provisions as about keeping watch for the approach of the enemy, and the garrison of one hundred and forty-five men were shut up in the fortress with a scant supply of food. Travis had been a recruiting officer at San Filipe, and had been sent from that place with a small detachment of men to guard the fortress of San Antonio, while Generals Houston, Fannin, Grant, and Austin were occupied in defending other points where the heaviest attacks were anticipated. The men under Travis had no

training in arms save that of the use of their rifles in killing game, fighting the Indians and protecting their homes. There was no military rule; only a brave, heroic purpose and dogged determination to hold their post until aid could reach them. But aid did not come, save by small bands of resolute men who dared to steal through the Mexican lines. Colonel Travis was a native of North Carolina, only twenty-eight years old, tall, fair, and of erect and manly bearing. He was a young lawyer; and because of a prominent part he had taken in the early Mexican disturbances, he had won the undying enmity of Santa Anna. Next under Travis was Colonel Bowie, a thorough product of the all-over West, and inventor of the murderous knife which bears his name to-day. With them was the immortal Crockett, that unique Tennesseean, with his great love for the woods and the chase —the popular prince at the rustic pleasure bouts and the sportsman king of the shooting matches. Colonel Bonham, of South Carolina, was another handsome, spirited fellow who fell in the terrible slaughter.

For two long weeks the siege lasted, with great loss to the Mexican forces, many of them succumbing to the accurate firing of the Texans, who were jealously watchful of their ammunition, and took care that every bullet should bring down a Mexican. Crouched behind the cover of the thick fortress walls, they successfully re-

pulsed the enemy with the withering fire of their artillery and of the rifles from the port holes.

Fate had marked them for martyrs, or else the stirring appeal of Colonel Travis "to the people of Texas and all Americans in the world" would have been heeded, and the aid sent the garrison that they so sorely needed. Colonel Bonham, who made his escape through the Mexican picket lines, as a courier for the garrison, seeking aid, returned with a message from Colonel Fannin, of Goliad, that he would march at once to their relief. The breaking down of his ammunition wagon, and the lack of oxen to get his cannon across the river, during his march toward San Antonio, rendered futile his efforts to reach the Alamo with his three hundred men. As he had no food for his troops save a little rice and dried beef, he returned to Goliad.

In his last message to the government Travis said, in part: "The determined spirit and desperate courage of my men heretofore exhibited, I feel will not fail them in the final struggle. They may be sacrificed to the vengeance of the enemy, but their victory will cost them so dear, that it will prove worse than a defeat." After that last message there was no more appeal heard from the old battered fortress; it was a bitter hand-to-hand fight with the enemy to the death. By all the cunning stratagem his crafty brain could devise, Santa Anna planned and replanned his attacks upon the fortress, but it was not until the arrival of more troops on March

2d, that he at last broke the lines and stormed the Alamo. On Sunday, after having given his troops three days in which to rest, he prepared for the onslaught. In the gray, uncertain light of early morning, the sound of bugle notes rang out over the river and the bands struck up the Spanish air of Deguelo (Cut-throat), the signal that no quarter would be shown in the attack they were going to make. Santa Anna viewed the attack from the battery in front of the plaza, longing to wreak vengeance for the vast number of his soldiers who had been slain during the long and bitter siege.

A deadly fire from the artillery and rifles through the port holes of the fortress walls, drove back the column attacking the north wall. At the eastern and western walls they were likewise repulsed. The columns swaying around to the north side were driven forward by the blows and shouts of their officers. Once more the Mexicans recoiled under the withering fire from the artillery and rifles, each Texan being supplied with two and in some cases three loaded guns, which were fired with great coolness and precision.

At the third attack the Mexicans scaled the walls, carrying the redoubt at the sally port. They filled the convent yard, the Texans withdrawing into the convent and hospital for shelter, fighting from room to room, using their bowie knives and clubbed rifles as long as they could lift a hand to strike. The Mexicans fired

a howitzer into the hospital room, carrying death and destruction by wholesale. Colonel Travis and Colonel Bonham had already fallen. Crockett was killed in the last struggle which took place in the church, falling near the entrance with his clubbed rifle in his hand. Bowie was shot from the door of a room as he lay wounded. He had half lifted himself from his bed, firing his pistols at his enemies and heroically defending himself to the last. Another wounded man, by the name of Walters, was pursued by the Mexicans, who shot him and then raised him on their bayonets and held him aloft until his blood ran down upon them.

At nine o'clock the Alamo had fallen. Santa Anna left the shelter of the battery to visit the scene. A small party of five or six men who had secreted themselves were brought before him. Among the number was a Mexican half caste, with Mextico Indian blood. His skin was dark and leathery from long exposure to the elements, his hair slightly grizzled, but his lithe, sinewy form was erect, and his manner defiant to the last. General Castrillion interceded with Santa Anna for their lives, but he reprimanded him and ordered them executed. As the Mexican soldiers lifted their bayonets, a tall Texan, bronzed from sun and wind, faced the enemy with defiance, cursing them to the last, as cowards of the rankest type, to let a mere handful of men hold them at bay so long, and they with their "whole army at their back." A bayonet thrust

was his only answer, and he fell headlong among his murdered comrades.

After the slaughter, the bodies of the dead Texans were collected by the command of Santa Anna and piled together between layers of dry wood, a mound of dry brush was built above them and the whole mass burned, their ashes and bones being left to the dogs and vultures.

The men, under Colonel Travis, when he went into the garrison, numbered one hundred and forty-five, and from time to time during the long siege, small squads stole in to help defend the Alamo. One party from Gonzales, under Captain J. W. Smith, with three Mexicans from the town and a few scattering Americans, were the only ones who came to their aid. These brought the number to about one hundred and eighty in all. Had Travis been more thoroughly skilled in strategic warfare, he probably would not have undertaken the defense of the Alamo with so small a number of troops. They could have made their escape as easily as the party from Gonzales made their way into the fort, but it was their preference and choice to die in their tracks, rather than back out from an enemy they hated so bitterly. The invincible courage of their cool and desperate natures determined them to stay and fight to the last; it was only one of the many desperate chances for their lives, with the odds against them, that they had taken before.

It is not possible to give in detail here all of

the struggles against privation and all the heroic fortitude that characterized the small army that fought for and won the Independence of Texas. Our story purports to deal principally with life in San Antonio, from her first founding by the Franciscan friars, of their missions there and in the valley of the San Antonio River, for the purpose of educating and Christianizing the Indians, to the days when peace, prosperity, and security waved its banners over her and the homes of our friends who helped to make part of her history.

After the massacre of Travis and his men in the Alamo, Santa Anna moved from San Antonio, where he left General Sesma in charge of a strongly fortified garrison. Samuel Houston had been called from New Washington, where the new constitution had been formed and where the spirit of independence was being fostered by the news of the attack upon the Alamo. He could not leave the unfinished work to go himself, for Texas had not yet been declared a republic, but he sent couriers to Fannin at Goliad, and to the people generally, to send help to the besieged fortress, and to say that the birth of the new republic would be hastened as speedily as possible, that the convention might be dismissed, and the men forming it take up their arms and help defend their independence. The constitution was signed by fifty members, three of whom were Mexicans. The convention adjourned, and the provisional government moved its head-

quarters to Harrisburg, on the Buffalo Bayou. Mrs. Dickenson, wife of Lieutenant Dickenson, who had perished in the defense of the Alamo, was sent as a messenger to the colonists in the east settlements. The message she bore was from Santa Anna, that he was victor of the field and that they were to give up their arms and submit to his rule.

Antonio Borgaro, a Mexican from San Antonio, carried definite news of the fall of the Alamo to the citizens of the town of Gonzales. There was a scene of mourning and bitter grief in the little town, for the larger portion of its male population had belonged to the Gonzales party who had gone to the relief of the Alamo. Houston reached the town on the 11th of March and was met by the news of the massacre. He at once sent a message to Goliad with orders to Colonel Fannin to blow up the fort and evacuate the place, by his right as Commander-in-Chief of the Texan army. Fannin was ordered to march to Victoria, on the Guadalupe River, and intrench himself there to await further orders. Then he set himself to calm the panic among the people of the little town of Gonzales. He brought order out of chaos by taking the lead in forming the citizens into an evacuating party. After leaving the town it was fired, and as the marching band looked backward they could see their homes in a blaze, the lurid flames outlined against the night sky. On his way, and at different times, he was joined by parties of volunteers

until his force numbered four hundred and seventy-four men. He pushed on with his party until they reached the Colorado River, fording it at a place called Burnham's Crossing. Here he pitched his camp and waited for news from Fannin. When Fannin received Houston's dispatch, ordering him to abandon Goliad and fall back to Victoria, he was in command of about five hundred men, who consisted almost entirely of volunteers from the United States, very few of them being Texans. The work of evacuation was begun by the bringing in of the families from the adjoining town of Refugio. It was learned the Mexican forces were marching toward the town, and though every precaution was taken to hasten the evacuation of the place after the intelligence received, it was too late to escape the enemy. Fannin had erected earthworks about the old stone mission of Goliad and called it Fort Defiance. He had also hoped to be able to hold the town against the forces of the enemy, and made the irretrievable blunder of delaying in obeying Houston's orders. Numerous couriers had been sent out for news of the rescuing party sent to the families of Refugio, but he waited in vain for their return. At last he sent out a reconnoitering party under Captain Horton, who came back with the report that a large force was advancing from the direction of San Antonio. He held a consultation with his officers, and it was decided to retreat. The heavy pieces of cannon were buried, the fort was dis-

mantled, and all supplies that could not be carried with the force were destroyed. Across the open savannah, with no protection save a few belts of skirting timber, the march was begun toward Coleto Creek, some ten miles away. As the morning fog cleared away, the bright sunshine outlined the sand dunes and skirting timbers against the intensely blue sky. Far away, a couple of mounted videttes, who had paused with drawn rein upon a high knoll to reconnoiter, watched the train moving along toward the scattering belts of timber.

When nearing the sheltering timbers of the Celto, Fannin made another great mistake, against the advice of his officers, in stopping his train in the open, that the horses might graze upon the grass that had lately sprung up. When the teams had been grazing for upwards of two hours Fannin gave orders to gather them in, hitch up and move forward. As they were preparing to resume the march, a dark line of cavalry was seen emerging from a belt of timber some two miles to the right of Fannin's force. They advanced at a rapid pace and formed a mass which obstructed the way between the Texan force and the shelter of the timber skirting the creek. It was the command of General Urrea; and by three o'clock, just one hour after their appearing upon the scene, the enemy had planted their troops and opened fire on the Texas train. The Mexicans charged with great impetuosity, but were driven back by the withering fire of the ar-

tillery and rifles of the Texans. Urrea endeavored to break the Texan lines by a cavalry charge led by himself, but he was beaten back by a discharge of grapeshot from the howitzer and the rifle volleys. Again and again the assault was made, the Mexican officers pricking their men from behind with their swords to urge them on. It was impossible to hold them in line, the cavalry breaking as they came in range of the artillery of the Texans. There was a wild, mad retreat of the Mexicans; the plain was strewn with dead men and horses; the infantry was driven into wilder confusion by the dashing of riderless horses, crazed with fright, through their lines. The Mexican forces were finally rallied for another assault. Fannin had been wounded in the last engagement, but still commanded his troops with great coolness and courageous bearing. The firing continued until dark, and then Urrea drew off his troops. The camp fires of the Mexican army gleamed in the darkness, and the cry of "sentinela alerte" sounded continually along the lines.

The cannon of the Texans had locked from heat, as there was no water to sponge and cool them off; only a few rounds of ammunition were left, and Fannin advised his men to accept the alternative and make their escape by retreating during the night, which was intensely dark and foggy. Such a move would have necessitated the leaving of the wounded, some sixty men, behind, and this the men refused to do.

By an oversight the wagons containing the provisions had been left behind, and there was neither food nor drink for the besieged. In the morning reinforcements joined the enemy, bringing fresh artillery and a large number of pack-mules laden with ammunition and supplies. The Texans realized the odds were against them, and a consultation of the officers was held. The decision arrived at was for a surrender, if honorable and safe terms could be obtained. Fannin objected, but was overruled by the majority.

The white flag was hoisted, and the enemy immediately responded. Colonel Fannin, accompanied by Major Wallace and Captain Durangue as interpreter, met the Mexican officers in conference, and it was agreed that upon the Texans surrendering as prisoners of war, they should be treated according to the usages of civilized nations, and the wounded would be taken back to Goliad, where their wounds would be cared for. It was also agreed that the men would be sent to New Orleans at the first opportunity under parole, with the promise that they would take up arms no more against the Mexican government. The Mexican officer who was appointed to receive the surrendered arms, placed them inside a box, nailed it up, and set it aside with the assurance that they would be delivered to them on their release. But they were never released; they were taken back to Goliad and placed in an old mission church under heavy guard. They were huddled together in the

church that was too small for the number of prisoners, and given only four ounces of fresh beef, which they were compelled to cook as best they could. In a few days about one hundred more Texans, who had been captured by Urrea's scouts, were brought into Goliad and placed in the same prison. When the news reached Santa Anna of the capture of Fannin's force, he sent orders to Lieutenant-Colonel Portilla, who had them under charge, as he was Commandant of Goliad, to have the prisoners all shot. Portilla was much agitated and filled with sorrow by the receipt of the order. The news spread among the Mexican officers that Santa Anna had given orders for the massacre, and the more humane were indignant and horrified at his savage cruelty. Much as they hated him for his barbarous nature, he was their superior officer, and his orders must be obeyed. It was in the early morning of Palm Sunday, the day set for the execution. The prisoners were awakened, and in three separate divisions they were taken out of the town by different roads. When about a mile beyond the town the divisions were halted, the right line of guards passed to the left, and order was given to fire, and the volleys were poured in at close range. The prisoners fell in heaps, one upon the other. A few staggered to their feet, unwounded, and made a dash for the timber. They were pursued by the cavalry and shot down as they ran, the wounded being stabbed to death where they fell by the bayonets of

the guards. Twenty-seven succeeded in making their escape by reaching the woods, swimming the river, and making their way by night and hiding by day, until they reached the settlements. Later in the day Colonel Fannin and one of his under officers were taken out about a half a mile from the town to be executed. Fannin received the order for his execution with a calm demeanor; he handed his watch to the commanding officer, asking that it be sent to his family; also he requested that he not be shot in the head, and that his body be given decent burial. The under officer refused to kneel at the word of command, and was shot while denouncing the Mexicans as cold-blooded murderers. His body, along with Fannin's, was thrown into the heap with the rest of the murdered prisoners, and the next day some brushwood was piled upon the mass and set on fire, but was insufficient to consume the bodies, which were seen the following day, a scorched and mangled prey for the vultures. The number of prisoners killed by the Mexicans who had them under guard amounted to over three hundred and twenty. The crime of the butchery rested entirely upon Santa Anna; and the massacre was as bunglingly executed as it was cruel, cowardly, and treacherous. His aim was to strike terror into the hearts of the Texan colonists and drive them out of the province by his merciless severity, but his cruel butcheries only roused them to a higher pitch of fury. He executed a march of

general devastation after the massacre of Goliad, sweeping the face of the land clean of all inhabitants as he went, killing stock and burning homes, carrying destruction as he went and leaving desolation in his wake. To the credit of the Mexican officers it can be said that they were shocked at Santa Anna's savage barbarity, and some of them had the courage to express to him their shame and mortification.

It remained for the dauntless and daring Houston to out-maneuver Santa Anna and demolish his army. Houston had remained at Burnham's Crossing for two days, gathering fugitive families from the settlements who were fleeing from the wrath of Santa Anna, and also waiting until he could hear from Fannin, to whom he sent his orders for the evacuation of Goliad. At this time he had not over seven hundred men, and not hearing from Fannin, he sought to better entrench his troops by moving further down the river to a place known as Beason's Crossing, where he remained, still waiting for news from Fannin, until the 26th. On the 19th General Sesma and General Woll arrived with a Mexican force estimated at about six hundred men, striking camp about two miles above Beason's Crossing, the place of Houston's encampment. Houston disputed Sesma's crossing the river; the Mexicans fell back and made no further attempt to cross. Houston kept out spies to ascertain the number of men in Sesma's force, and if he was receiving any reinforce-

ments. He could have fallen upon the Mexicans and driven them back, but he was waiting for news of the movements of Fannin and his troops.

On the night of the 25th a fugitive from the Goliad massacre arrived in camp with the news of the capture and massacre of Fannin and his troops. Houston flew into a rage, declared the man to be a traitor and a spy and ordered him under guard for execution the next morning, a threat which he did not carry out, for he feared the effect of the news upon his men, and sought to keep it from them. He visited the man privately at night, and was satisfied at the close of the interview that the report was correct. He made up his mind to fall back to the Brazos, but he kept his own council, taking into his confidence no one save his chief-of-staff. He began his retreat on the evening of the 26th. His men were restless and hungry for a fight; they could see nothing in retreating but a show of timidity in meeting the foe. But Houston was indefatigable; his sagacity and shrewd and clever maneuvering finally brought his fiery and insubordinate troops, over swollen streams and across boggy prairies, to the valley of the Brazos, where he was joined by the vice-president of the new republic, Zavala, and also a small company of men from eastern Texas. Houston remained encamped, all the time keeping spies busy feeling for the movements of the Mexican army, and especially for the whereabouts of Santa Anna,

who had himself hastened forward to take command of Sesma's column. General Urrea and General Gaona had been ordered to meet the forces of Sesma at San Filipe. Santa Anna and Sesma arrived at San Filipe only to find that Houston had vanished into the woods. Houston's scouts had reported to him that the advance of the Mexican army had reached the valley of the Brazos, and when he heard the news he issued an order to his army, saying, "The moment we have waited for with anxiety and interest is fast approaching. The victims of the Alamo, and the names of those who were murdered at Goliad call for cool, deliberate vengeance. Let the army be in condition for action at a moment's warning." In the meantime the citizens of Cincinnati had sent to the Texan commander a couple of six-pounder guns known as "the twin sisters." Canister for these was made of broken pieces of old iron and horseshoes, tied in bags.

On the 14th, Houston began his march to the south, following up the trail of the Mexican army. Spies brought in a prisoner bearing a buckskin bag full of dispatches to Santa Anna from General Filisola, in the City of Mexico. This proved to Houston that the Mexican commander-in-chief was with the force below them. He held a brief conference with his Secretary of War, and then called his officers together. His words were concise and to the point. His army had reached the Buffalo Bayou, opposite

the ruins of Harrisburg, which was yet smoking from the fires lit by Santa Anna. To his men he said: "The army will cross, and we will meet the enemy. Some of us may be killed, but, soldiers, remember the Alamo, and remember Goliad."

The dogged courage which had borne the men up during the long privations of the retreat from the Colorado, now flamed into a burning thirst for victory and revenge. The bayou was running bank-full; but here, as in all past occasions, they rode over every obstacle in their onward march until they were entrenched in a heavy live-oak grove on the banks of the bayou, near Lynch's Ferry, where the bayou forms a junction with the San Jacinto River, where Santa Anna's army was to make its crossing. Forgetting hunger and fatigue, they proceeded to build breastworks and plant the two cannon. There was a stretch of gently rolling prairie some two miles wide. At its farther edges lay the marshes of the San Jacinto River, which extended around in a curve to the south; the horizon was bounded by the timbers growing at the river's edge. In the rear of the live-oak grove, with its great curtains of weeping Spanish moss, ran the sluggish, muddy waters of the Buffalo Bayou. The two cannon—"the twin sisters"—had been planted at the edge of the grove, to give shelter to the men encamped near them.

Santa Anna had completed the destruction at

New Washington, and was advancing toward Lynch's Ferry, when he learned through his scouts of the close proximity of the Texan army. For the moment he almost lost his native cunning, becoming highly excited and almost creating a panic among his men by his half-distracted movements. At last, when he had recovered himself, he rallied his forces and formed for an attack, advancing upon Houston's forces. All day long a desultory show of besieging the Texan troops was kept up by Santa Anna, who kept his men out of range of the Texan guns. He tried to decoy the Texans from their stronghold, but Houston refused to advance for an engagement, and defied Santa Anna to come on. Nightfall stopped the fighting, and the Texans rested under double guard. The next day General Cos joined Santa Anna, with a force of five hundred fresh men. Secretly, Houston dispatched two of his most trusted men as couriers, with orders to take axes and ride to Vince's Bayou, and cut the bridge spanning the stream. Vince's Bayou was a stream running into Buffalo Bayou, about eight miles north of the Texan camp, and over which both armies had passed on their way into the cul-de-sac.

The burning of the bridge cut off all means of retreat, and made the coming battle a fight for life or death. In the middle of the afternoon, about half past three o'clock, Houston gave orders for his troops to form in line of battle; the Texan army had no music save a drum and

fife, and while the troops were forming, they struck up the air "Will You Come Into My Bower?"

With his officers heading their various companies and squadrons, Houston himself leading the center, and Rusk the left wing, and with the cannon moved farther out on the prairie, the order to advance was given at four o'clock. The strong, eager faces were lit up by the afternoon sunlight that was shining full in their eyes, as, with trailing arms, and in their stained and ragged garments, they moved forward. As they neared the enemy their pace quickened to a run, Houston dashing up and down between the lines, his tall form towering like a giant, waving his old white hat, and shouting and cursing and yelling to his men to hold fire until he gave the word. The two couriers dashed up at this juncture, shouting at the pitch of their voices, "You must fight for your lives, boys, for Vince's bridge has been cut!"

The Texans did not halt until they were at close range, then firing a volley upon the enemy, they rushed forward with terrific yells, the words of Houston in his charge ringing down the lines—"Remember the Alamo!" echoed back up the lines by "Remember Goliad!"

Santa Anna was taken by surprise; the noise of the yelling horde of Texans, as they made the attack, had roused him from the enjoyment of his siesta in the privacy of his tent. He rushed out to discover the enemy almost at the door of

his tent. He yelled savagely to his officers to rally their men into line, running to and fro, in a half-frantic state of mind, and swearing like a pirate. His entire force had been caught in a half-restful mood with arms stacked, for Santa Anna had given up all idea of any battle for the day. The cavalrymen were riding bareback to and fro watering their horses, and the infantry were busied in cutting brush and making more comfortable quarters. Dismayed and confused by the suddenness of the attack, the Mexican troops scattered in all directions. Santa Anna seemed to have lost all stratagem, and rushed about in a crazed and half-distracted manner, ordering and counter-ordering his officers. His soldiers, perceiving his excitement, were seized with a panic and began rushing pell-mell over everything in a mad effort to make their escape.

General Castrillion was the first to swing his men into line, and face the oncoming horde of yelling Texans. The panic among the Mexican troops was subsiding, but before they had thoroughly planted themselves to meet the attack, the Texans had butted their rifles, drawn their bowie-knives, and plunged into the mass.

It was here that the battle was fought which gave Texas her independence, and freed her forever from the tyranny of Mexican rule; and it was here that Houston's generalship lifted him from the humble position of an Indian scout to his kinship with the immortals. All time was condensed into that day and that hour for that

small army of Texans, as they made their charge for victory and for revenge.

When the battle was over the scene was appalling. The Mexican army had lost heavily; the dead and the wounded lay thick upon the ground, their blood saturating the turf; riderless horses dashed through the bruised and mangled mass, and those who were not wounded were scurrying hard to make their escape.

The Texan loss was very small in proportion; heretofore it had been defeat at every turn, but the deeds of valor this day would ring down the annals of time forevermore. Nearly all of the Mexicans who were not killed or wounded were made prisoners, only a few of them escaping.

Santa Anna, with his wily, fox-like nature, eluded the enemy's noose for several hours, but was at last captured by a scouting party, under Colonel Theodore Hackett, and brought into Houston's camp, riding double behind one of the men. He had ventured out of his hiding place to reconnoiter, and as he was creeping along among some scrub chaparral growing at the crest of a knoll, he was spied by the scouting party, who dashed forward and captured him. It was not until they rode into camp with their prisoner that they knew it was the chief commander of the Mexican army they held in custody. They believed him to be an officer, however, as his fine linen and jeweled shirt studs proved him to be above the ordinary soldier. It was through the excited cry of the Mexican

prisoners, as they rode into camp with their captive, that the Texans first learned whom they had brought back. Ringing through the timbers of the river bottom, and floating over the marshes, went the cry "Viva Santa Anna! Viva Santa Anna!"

CHAPTER XVIII

With the capture of Santa Anna, the war of Mexico against Texas was brought to a close, for peace was declared soon after the battle of San Jacinto, under measures from the Mexican government, which gave Texas full independence, and she was recognized by all nations as an independent republic. Her army was placed under the command of General Houston, and her statecraft was in the hands of men who had fought for the right of possession of the soil that had been stained by the blood of their slaughtered comrades.

With the return of peace to the country, prosperity soon began to revive; the natural resources and great productiveness of the land gave inducements to renewed immigration; and the land that had lain so long in the grasp of rapine and butcheries lifted herself out of the conditions that had enthralled her, and proudly unfurled her hard-earned banner of freedom to the breeze.

Our old friend, Theodore Hackett, was mustered out of Houston's army, with his rugged nature still unimpaired. Xamino and Fairfax had fallen with the Alamo, but they left sons behind them who would grow into manhood and enjoy the peace and right of possession, for the sake of

which the country's banner had been baptized with their fathers' blood.

The jealous struggles among the Liberal Party, when once they became dictators of Mexico, had disgusted Xamino, and in a hot, passionate mood he had left Monterey, returning to San Antonio with his family, where he made his home. He and Fairfax had given their lives in defense of their homes, as had the other brave fellows who went down with the Alamo.

Old Don Arguella never lived to see the downfall of royalty; his party was reigning in full power at the time he passed away, and Mexico had not yet gained her freedom from Spain. Carmen being his only heir, the old Arguella house had fallen to her, and it was here that the widow of Xamino lived and reared her children after the new republic was born. She was herself the sole instructor and supervisor of her children's education; and in the strict seclusion of her caste, she remained a distinct living representative of the old régime during the days when San Antonio was governed by the Spaniards. Her bitter sorrow over the unnatural death of her husband was only what many another woman of San Antonio had suffered in days gone by. He still lived within her heart in sweetest memory, though his face had passed away from among those of the living; in the face of his children she traced again the beloved features, whose pathos and poetry had won the love of her life.

The old Don had died in Monterey, where he had gone for a lengthened stay with Xamino and Carmen. He had told them, when dying, of a chest of Spanish gold buried within the garden walls at his home in Bexar, but his directions were so unintelligible that the treasure was never found, and those who looked for it came to think of the story as a dream or phantasy of the dying man's weakened brain.

Besides money left him at the old viceroy's death, Xamino had achieved good success for himself; and it was with a vast acreage of untilled land, some money, and a comfortable home that Senora Xamino found herself possessed of when she was left to face the future alone, until her sons were old enough to fill their father's place in the management of her affairs. Not the wealth and ease she had once been accustomed to, but enough so that she need not enter into a hand-to-hand struggle with poverty. She kept the old home and its surroundings intact as far as possible, the wood-lawn with its grand old shade trees, and the old court with its beautiful plants and shrubs and vines clambering about the pillars of the porches, open to the summer breezes, laden with the perfume of the sweet Castilian roses. They all brought back to her sweetest memories of bygone days. Now all things seemed in strange hands in the old town, and to her the old home was the only link with the past; she clung to it tenaciously, and sought

in every way she could to preserve its old familiar characteristics.

Fairfax had been fairly successful, but had achieved no great heritage of wealth to leave his only son, "Young Allan," as he was called among the drovers at the Shackleford ranch, where he and his mother made their home after his father's death. It was a strip of country that had been left almost barren after the destructive raids of Santa Anna, whose passing army had indulged in the willful slaughter of cattle and horses, as well as men, and left them to rot on the plains.

It is in and around the Shackleford ranch, and the country to the west of San Antonio that the closing scenes of this story are laid. The Shackleford ranch lay in what was called the North Settlements, a barren, bleak district, whose northern boundaries touched the foot of the "Estacado" or Staked Plains; the southern boundaries were less arid, and the vegetation had none of the parched and seared look that comes to the face of the land farther to the north. Not far from this more fertile and better watered district of the North Settlements ran the old military road leading from Monterey to Nacogdoches, and it was from this highway that the settlers received all news or trade from the outside world. The old St. Louis and Santa Fe military and trading road ran too far to the north of them to be of any service.

The "Valley" or "South Settlements" were

those near Hackett's ranch, and the rich valley lands had all been taken up by the first comers until there had been nothing left for the later immigrants but the arid plains to the northward.

During the devastation of Santa Anna's pillaging army, the settlers had fled to Bexar, only to be struck with dismay, which scattered them in every direction, when they learned that he was advancing upon the town. When victory came, and independence was declared, each man returned with his family to his home, save those whose lives had been offered as a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom. The home of our friend Hackett had not felt the pillaging hand as heavily as had the settlers in the colonies north of him. They had suffered from the destructive hand of Santa Anna's army, and from bands of wild, savage Indians also; but the latter had done but little harm to Hackett, for it was known among the smaller tribes that the Comanches were his friends, and that swift punishment would be dealt out to the Indian molesting the beeves and mustangs bearing the brand of the "Big Sachem."

Hackett had removed his wife and child to a place of safety, left his cattle on the range, and the round corral of the caballada, with its snubbing post in the center, was left idle while this absolute master of this pastoral Spanish grant went to join his force of some thirty caballeros from his ranch, together with one hundred and

seventy mustered soldiers from the colonies north of him, to the main army under Houston, then camped on the Colorado River, at Beason's Crossing.

When victory was won, he was mustered out of service and returned to his home, expecting to find his buildings destroyed, his beeves killed, and little left but his land. His dwelling had been ransacked and everything of any worth that had been left when the family was removed, was gone, the doors had been torn off the hinges, leaving the openings yawning and shutterless, but the main building, low-roofed, rambling, and commodious, had been left intact.

Before many months had rolled by, the indomitable courage of Hackett had worked a marked change for the better, and his home had taken on a more inviting air.

One thing had left a sore and sad sting in his heart, and that was the loss of his friend Xamino, and the fate that had befallen him and the other brave men who had perished while defending their post of duty and waiting for help to reach them. "Oh God! If I had only heard of their helpless condition in time to have reached them with a band of blood-thirsty Comanches!" he soliloquized, when brooding in desperation over the bloody massacre.

CHAPTER XIX

The vast expanse of gray tableland lay still as a picture in the throbbing heat of the noon sun, up where the northwest boundaries of the two western colonies met and blended. From the brazen arch of the sky the heat poured down from a hot August sun. The silence of waste places held the gaunt, sterile land, sapless and lean, its marks of disease showing in the white scurf of alkali breaking through its parched surface.

A chain of low, rolling sand hills lay afar in the purpling distance, a few scattering cacti, and for the rest, only a sparse, drab-colored growth of sage brush and a few tufts of buffalo grass. In the dead silence and isolation of the scene there was but one point of life to meet the eye; from a large knoll, boldly outlined by the blue of the sky, a solitary horseman was scanning the horizon to the west, his far-flung gaze sweeping over the barren waste before him, seeking for some trace of cattle following the trail leading to the watering places far below. With patient, searching gaze he turned again toward the mighty expanse of desert land to the north, but not a sign could be seen of that which his eagle eye sought; he looked toward the distant hills, but not a wisp of smoke from far-away camp-

fire, not a trace of the footprint of any human being met his eye—only the great, vast silence of the desert was over all the scene, only the desert winds stirring slightly, which, in passing, touched his cheek like the scorching breath from a furnace. As he sat wrapped in this complete silence, the sound of horses' feet upon the loose gravel at the foot of the slope caused him to swing round in swift inquiry. Soon a horseman appeared in the open at the foot of the ridge below. The man on the crest of the knoll rode swiftly down the slope, and soon the two were in close range. The man riding down from the knoll sat lightly in his saddle on his trained herder, whose footfall was as light as that of a deer. But as light as were the hoof-beats of his horse, the quick ear of the rider in the open caught the sound, and turning quickly, the two riders faced each other with the gaze of inquiry exchanged at the meeting of travelers on the plains.

The herdsman drew a sharp breath, and brought his pony to her haunches, as he discovered the fact that the rider gazing so steadily at him was a young woman. She sat her pony man fashion, and wore the loose garments, horseskin boots, and heavy spurs used by the desert riders of the North Settlements, but on her pony was the double-heart brand which belonged to the Valley Settlements. The riata tied so compactly at the pommel of her saddle, the leathern-covered canteen, the sheath knife slanting from

behind her right hip, the stirrups, thorn-scarred and weatherbeaten, were all manlike. A soft knot of black hair, coiled low on the neck underneath a man's slouch hat, was the only feminine touch to be seen in her dress. Her face was suntanned to a boyish tinge of brown, and on her soft cheek was the red glow of a ripe peach kissed by an August sun. She viewed him, as they faced each other, with that alert look of buoyant self-reliance which comes from facing the problems of existence as they arise in the trackless desert under naked skies.

For the moment "Young Allan" Fairfax—for he was still "Young Allan" at the Shackleford ranch—felt as if the earth were moving beneath him, and could hardly assure himself that it was really he looking at the queer, odd creature before him. A sunstroke from the desert sometimes made men go mad; was he suffering from such an ailment? Some such thought flashed quickly through his mind; but suddenly his hand went to his sombrero, and doffing it with the instinct of the courtier, he said, in a half questioning way: "Howdy? Lost your way?" venturing both the salute and the inquiry at the same time. She stared at him in some surprise and with cool curiosity, then a low, free laugh escaped her —this child of the desert, who could ride swift as the desert winds. Suddenly her eyes flashed with enthusiasm and she gave reply to his question.

"As if I were ever lost, with the sun and the wind, the moon and the stars to guide me."

"I thought you were a boy from the top of the hill up there," he said, jerking his head backward. She shrugged her shoulders and her red lips curved with contempt.

"I am as good as any boy;" patting the coils of her lasso in a suggestive manner as she spoke.

"And a thousand times better," replied Allan, his blood tingling with admiration. "But it is strange. Do the other girls you know go about in—in men's clothes?" he finally ventured to say.

"I don't know any girls."

"None round about your district but yourself—all women?"

"There is only one I know—the senora, my mother; she's at home."

"Dressed like that?"

"No, she wears dresses. So do I when I am at home with her, but when I am out after the cattle with the padre, I am like I am now," she answered, looking down at the toe of her deerskin boot, and then turning her foot sideways, letting the sun glint upon her small steel rolled spur. His pulses quickened as he took in the lithe, unstudied grace of her every movement, the small feet, and tapering hand, brown as an Indian maid's.

"Aren't you afraid to ride alone? The Indians might scalp you. Where is your father?"

"Riding his section of the round-up as I am

mine," she replied, looking him full in the face, untroubled by the consciousness of sex. Allan let his pony move up slowly until he was beside her. "Your pony bears one of the Valley brands?" he ventured, in a half-questioning tone.

"And we come from the Valley—both Red Calf and his rider; our home is in the Valley, where my father's sheep and cattle graze in the winter, but when the spring round-up was over there were lots of cattle missing, drifting from the Pecos to the Cross Timbers of the North Settlements, making their way over the dry, table lands," sweeping her hand as she spoke, toward the vast expanse of drab-colored land before them.

"Some day, Senorita, there will be trouble for you. Aren't you afraid of the greasers infesting the border, and stealing and rushing cattle over the line? They might cut you off from your friends on some of your long rides and capture you and carry you away."

She smiled, as she silently motioned toward her rifle swinging by her pony's side. The droop of her long lashes as she looked down at her rifle, the full red lips parted and showing white, even teeth, lured him on. He came still a pace closer, full of admiration, and a new zest in life coursing through his veins.

"Take care!" she cautioned, sharply, and he stopped short, covered with confusion at his un-

witting boldness. "Red Calf doesn't like strangers."

There was truth in her words, for her pony was quietly turning away, with reefed ears, and a wicked eye looking over the head-stall, measuring distance like a range finder. Allan swore softly at himself for his dull stupidity; but the next moment his blood bounded in his veins, as she straightened herself in the saddle and motioned toward the open sweep before them, a daring smile playing over her face as though bantering him to the test of their ponies' speed. Away over the gray desert waste, swift as startled antelopes, sped the two horses, their noses stretched forward and their bodies lengthened out like leathern thongs. Fairfax restrained his horse at the outset from sheer gallantry, but soon found he would need all his reserve speed to keep up in the race. The girl threw him a backward glance as she rode away from him, her ringing laugh full of exultation and glee, for she felt that her pony had not yet let loose his best speed, and she was leading in the race. Allan settled himself a little more firmly in his saddle, and rowelling his horse's flank with his steel spurs he went forward with strong swiftness. He was by her side—had passed her. Suddenly she flashed past him like a bird on the wing. Again he came up with her, and again she rode away from him. Then bending all his energies he drove his horse forward with renewed speed, and as he came up even with her he reached

forth his hand and caught her pony's bridle at the bit. His eyes were sparkling with the spirit of the chase, and with a laugh that held the victor's ring he said:

"Captured!" He held firmly to the bridle; their faces were close together, his breath almost fanning her cheek. "How lucky for you, Senorita, it is not a Comanche who has captured you!" She drew out her sheath knife and reached forward to cut the bridle at the bit.

"The Comanches are my father's friends," she quietly remarked. Allan read her intentions by her movements and quickly loosened his hold upon her bridle. "The Comanche Indians never bother my father's cattle and sheep, and they all know I am his daughter. He made friends with them long ago, for he was the first white man to settle among them down there in the valley."

"The 'Big Sachem'?" questioned Allan, excitedly, as he leaned eagerly forward.

"The 'Big Sachem,'" reiterated the girl.

"Then you are—are—Miss Hackett," continued her questioner, as he gallantly lifted his hat.

"Miss Hackett," she repeated after him, giving him a sideways glance from her great dark eyes.

"Then you are not of Spanish blood, as I first thought?" queried her interrogator.

"My grandfather, Jose Mendoza, of San Antonio, came from Spain; my grandmother was Spanish and Mextica Indian," the girl replied.

"Do you ride often like this after the cattle, senorita?"

"Yes, but I seldom come so far north; I tend mostly the herd in the valley. When the cattle are drifting the padre keeps with his men, and I always go where the padre leads."

They had left the dry tablelands for a stretch of rolling green, leading to the southward. Suddenly the girl cast an upward glance at the sun, then at the shadows their horses cast upon the turf over which they were passing. "Noontime," she remarked, speculatively. "Guess we will find some water soon."

"It is all tainted with alkali around these regions. My canteen is full; how is yours?"

"Half empty," she replied, "but I see some dry grass and brush wood over there," pointing to where a growth of sage brush gave encouragement for the noon camp-fire. When they came to the place, Allan gathered the dry brush weeds for her and started the fire, and then led their horses to a patch of green, where they were staked to graze while dinner was being prepared. When he came back to the fire he found the girl busy about her saddle, drawing out cooking utensils and provisions from unimaginable stow-away places, all rolled up and tied fast in the folds of her sleeping blanket, which she carried strapped to the back of her saddle. He was madly in love with her already, and knew it deep within his heart. How he admired the little brown hands as they moved about so dex-

terously! By putting their stock of supplies together she soon prepared a tempting meal, and they sat down side by side to partake of the food, sitting flat upon the ground, with legs doubled under and backward to form a seat. They ate with zest, for their appetite had been sharpened by several long hours of hard riding. Between times, however, Allan made good his opportunity to find out more about this strange product of the feminine world. It suddenly dawned upon the girl that she did not know his name, and looking up from her work at the fire of readjusting the stick upon which the dough of their bread was cooking, she asked: "Senor, who is the stranger coming down from the North Settlements?"

"Allan Fairfax, or 'Young Allan,' as they call me about the ranch."

She gave him a swift, startled look, rested her elbows upon her knees, and for the moment was quiet, then looking up at him she spoke in a gentler tone.

"Your father was killed in the storming of the Alamo?"

"He was," replied Allan.

"Then you are no common caballero, but Lieutenant Fairfax, of one of the State ranger companies," declared the girl, now fully excited.

"The same man, and he who is so bitterly hated by the cattle rustlers of the border."

She was listening to him, and watching his face as he spoke; there was a bitterness in his

tones and she detected it. She was the next to voice her thoughts, and she sought to lead him away from his memories.

"My father's best friend was killed at the taking of the Alamo." She looked away, as she spoke, to where the foothills folded back one upon the other into cool, blue shadows. Soon she broke from her musings, looked with her great soft, dark eyes into his face, and said: "They say the older son, Antone Arguella Xamino, is like his father; I have seen him; he comes out to my father's hacienda often, and sometimes he rides the lines with us in search of the cattle."

Allan Fairfax felt a twinge of jealousy twitching at his heart strings, but gave no evidence of his feelings by his outward manner. "Does he always call you Miss Hackett?" he questioned, a quiet smile playing over his face, and a look of playful banter shining in his blue eyes.

"No, I am called Chiketa by every one on the ranch, but my mother had me christened by the good old Fray Garcia, down at the old mission, under the name of Emanuella Norveta Mendoza Hackett."

"A long but a pretty name, senorita. And so they call you Chiketa about your father's ranch; that means 'little one' in Spanish," remarked Allan, as he looked at her feet and hands and thought how well the name suited her.

"Look!" exclaimed the girl in excited tones, pointing as she spoke toward the distant line of

the low-lying hills. He turned, and looking in the direction whence she pointed, saw a big smoke arising from the foothills.

"The padre has found cattle and is calling for help," she cried.

Hastily she began putting her camping utensils in place, folded them back within the blanket, and rolled and strapped the bundle tightly in its accustomed place at the back of her saddle. Allan had brought in their ponies from their grazing by the time she had finished putting away the camp regalia, and together they saddled their horses and made ready. The girl examined the girth of her sadle closely, then swung herself swiftly into her saddle, taking her seat with the alertness of a veteran of the range.

Fairfax, while saddling his own horse, had watched her rapid movements with admiring glances. He would have ridden with her to the distant hills, but she shook her head when he turned his horse's head in that direction. "Not to-day senor," she said; "but some day, if you should ever come to the Montezuma Ranch, we will try another race. Red Calf will be rested then, and I'll bet you he will beat your cayuse by a whole furlong."

Digging her pony's side with her little spurs, she sprang into a long, easy canter. Without once looking backward she left him, and urging her horse she made for the distant camp-fire, and toward the foothills. Fairfax looked after her until she became a mere speck on the hori-

zon, then turning his horse's head he rode northward, letting his bridle swing loose with the wind, and leaving his pony to find his own way home in a long, swinging gallop, while his mind was still with the strange girl who had shared her food from the grub-sack with him, and who had cooked his dinner for him back there at the camp-fire, with no thought of sex troubling her mind, her cheek and eyes aglow with the fire of youth, health, and beauty.

CHAPTER XX

"How sweet at eve the lover's lute
Chimes, when the grove is mute,
And when the midnight moon should lave
Her forehead in the silver wave."

The full southern moon poured down its light from the blue sky on the wide, lonely plain. The dry, sandy earth, the stunted growth of chaparral, the mesquite trees, and the low-lying hills that skirted the plain, were all touched with a weird beauty as they lay in the white radiance.

Near the center of the plain the monotony was broken by a ranch house with its attendant outbuildings. It was the Shackleford ranch, and it stood alone amid all the solemn stillness. From the rich, succulent mesquite grass that defies drouth, an occasional clump of prickly-pear lifted thorny arms and reflected the silvery moonlight from its broad, fleshy leaves. The moonlight crept along the old stockade enclosure and the fence enclosing the cow-pen, the great open wagon-house, and the cattle corral, baptizing the whole scene with a quiet, peculiar brightness that shone like burnished silver, and resting like a benediction upon the ranch with its attendant buildings, and upon the wide, lonely plain.

About the door-yard of the ranch house grew

a couple of majestic elms and a few mesquite trees, which gave shade from the hot noon-tide sun. The corrals, horse-lots, and cow-pens were also shaded by a scattering, irregular growth of low-spreading mesquite trees, their fine, pale-green foliage glinting in the flood of silvery moonlight. Stretched at full length upon his blanket under the shade trees outside the door rests Lieutenant Fairfax. His leave of absence is almost over, for to-morrow he is to return to his company at the old fort out there on the border. He realizes all this, and he is thinking of to-morrow as he lies on his blanket flat upon his stomach; his arms are folded, forming a pillow upon which his head is resting, but he is not sleeping, he is wide awake, thinking, thinking of the girl he saw last as she rode away toward the distant hills. A hundred times and more had he gone over each incident that happened during the short hour they were together partaking of their noon meal. He had half resolved to give up his company and come back to the ranch, for in riding the lines with the gaucherros, as he used to do, he might meet her again. He knew how to reach her father's ranch. Yes, he could make some excuse, plausible enough, to take him there. "But that Mexican might be there," he told himself, and nothing did Lieutenant Fairfax hate as much as he hated a Mexican.

"At the thought of him even the tone of her voice grew softer, and that gentleness of tone

that always tells a woman's secret!" He had recalled the gentle look that had crept into the girl's face when speaking of Antone Xamino.

Growing restless under his musings he sat erect, filled his pipe with tobacco, lit it and began smoking; his feet were drawn backward and his hands interlocked about his knees. The smoke rolled away in clouds as he puffed at his pipe, and soon the nicotine began soothing his highly strung nerves.

"It will all smooth over with time," he told himself, as he finished smoking, emptied his pipe and put it aside to cool; then throwing himself upon his blanket he was soon sound asleep. The moon sailed on in the heavens, sifting her light through the leaves of the branches above the sleeper as he lay dreaming of dark-eyed maidens, fleet-limbed cayuses, and hurtling herds. Its silvery bars fell across the threshold of the door the housewife had left open to admit the cool night breeze. From the tree underneath which the sleeper lay came the hot cicada's sultry cry. On a bed in the corner of one of the rooms within, the good housewife rolled and tumbled in a restless and uneasy sleep, beating the air at intervals with a dried turkey wing to strengthen the lifting night breeze. The ranch hands were all sleeping, curled in their blankets beneath the stars, out near the stockade, while a picket stood guard, keeping watch for marauding Indians. From afar off could be heard the distant howl-

ing of a pack of coyote wolves, prowling over the prairie in search of food.

At the first peep of day the housewife arose from her uneasy bed to assume her routine of daily household duties; the men outside crawled from beneath their blankets; the chickens were cackling about the barnyard; and old "Saucer," the leader of a pack of hounds, was smiling in at the doorway of the kitchen at his mistress, hoping to get a stray crust or bone. Before the breakfast was ready Lieutenant Fairfax had made his brief morning toilet by a vigorous face and neck bath at the trough by the well, combed his hair with his pocket comb, brushed his trousers, crumpled and wrinkled from sleeping in them all night, and then went to the kitchen, where his mother was preparing the morning meal. She looked up from her task of pouring the hot grease over the eggs she was frying as his form darkened the doorway, and welcomed him, saying:

"Ah, my lad, you are looking bright as a June morning, and to-day is the day you are to leave home again for that bloody fort."

He had come to her side and stood watching her movements as she lifted the perfectly turned eggs on to the platter. He smiled an indulgent smile as he stooped and kissed her cheek, and then reaching for the platter of eggs he carried them to the table, and together they sat down to eat their breakfast alone, before the rest of the family joined them. These consisted of Allan's

grandfather, and his uncle, young Ben Shackleford, who was the real lord and master of the heath. He was a stocky-built fellow, brusque in his manner, but kind and considerate of his men about the ranch and on the range. He had never married, fearing to bring a wife lest his widowed sister with her child might not feel free to remain and make her home with him. Allan had grown to manhood around his feet, and he loved him as his own. This freak of Allan in joining the Rangers had been a sore spot in his heart, but he had come to look upon the fact with indulgence, hoping to see the day come when he would resign and come back to his place on the ranch.

"Ah, it's the fiery blood of his father that drives the lad out o' the common rut!" declared "daddy" Shackleford, in quavering tones, as he looked after the handsome young Ranger as he rode away from them, while they stood at the picket gate watching him.

A sigh escaped the mother as she turned away toward the house; and to forget her loneliness in the absence of her boy, she followed busy feet and hands all that day. "How like his father he has grown to look," she told herself each time she recalled the way he sat his saddle, and the easy grace with which he bent to the motion of his horse in its long, swinging gallop. In front of the house stood the old grub wagon that had done service for years, with the barrel securely fastened to one side, the grub-box stationed in the hindmost end of the bed. Astride the tongue

of the wagon sat one of the hands, mending his saddle and singing to himself as he worked; others were busy overhauling piles of pickets and mending weakened places in the long stockade; while still others were busy braiding lariats and hopples out of cowhide that had been rubbed and grained until it was pliable. The hands were getting ready gradually for the fall round-up and winter line-riding.

As Lieutenant Fairfax saw with a backward glance the ranch and its branding pens and corrals disappear from his sight, he settled himself in his saddle, shook out the tapedaros of his stirrups, and digging his pony with his big Spanish spurs, struck out across country over the plain, making his way westward, leaving behind him the headquarters ranch. That night he slept at the foreman's hut on Trail Creek, a stream which came down out of a canyon, and which lay more than sixty miles away from the main ranch. The following day about noon he rode into Fort Stockton, beyond the Pecos River.

A very different scene greets our eyes as we come to the Montezuma ranch, leaving the glimmering plain lying in a drowsy, trance-like quiet. There are other ranches scattered about in the Pecos and Nueces valleys, but none hold for us the charm that lingers about the home of our old veteran hero, who smokes his pipe beneath the huge live-oak that shades his door-yard, and recalls days gone by. He has passed through three revolutions and is nearing his seventieth year,

is still hearty, hale, and stout, much of which he attributes to his outdoor life on the open plain. He fought with the Mexicans in their revolt against Spain, aided the Texans in their revolt against Mexico, and served in the war between the United States and Mexico. Kind of heart, genial in nature, brave, cool, and sagacious, he had accomplished what he had set out to do, had buffeted the world and not suffered it to buffet him. The "golden fleece" was his; he had opulence and enjoyed his ease, and while he slept his wealth doubled itself, for his cattle spread everywhere from the Sabine to the Pecos. His heart is still as full of that deep, abiding love for his wife, as in the days when he first met her beside the old well in the town of de Bajar. There is that about him of a life that had been lived clean, sweet, and strong; the gleam of the master still shines brightly in his eyes, and he has the air of having mastered himself as well as others and all kinds of conditions. Far away the prairie billows gleam in the glow of the morning sunshine which rests like a blessing upon the level splendor of tender green. The breath of wild pinks that burst in crimson flare over the prairie is borne to him upon the breeze that fans his cheek. Where the level surface dips, the fennel flaunts a flood of flowery gold; the air is resonant with sleepy, summery sounds; the lisping of the breeze, the butterflies, wheeling in swift and flashing rings, looking like flying flowers, the song of birds among the trees—

all lull him into a peaceful repose, and loosening his mental hold upon his surroundings he drops into a quiet, gentle slumber.

The old stone house has been built anew, the main living-rooms being the body of the old house, with wide hallways and deep verandas. The stone had been quarried on Hackett's own ground, and he himself had supervised the building of his own house, utilizing the strength of the small company of peons under his dictatorship. Tree, shrub, and flower lent their aid to the beauty of the place. Down in the old garden, beneath the spreading tree where old Emanuella Mendoza sleeps, two more graves show beneath the sod. Close by her side sleeps the first born, little Emanuella, whose grave is tended by the second sister, bearing the same name; the other is the grave of Big Wolf, the red child of the desert.

Age has marred much of the symmetrical beauty of Norveta Mendoza's superb form, but there are still to be seen about her traces of her girlish simplicity, and the dark, rich beauty that had maddened Captain Cortez and won the heart of the only man she had ever loved.

To the east of the ranch the waving woodlands look like low-hung clouds. Here flows the Nueces River. Leading westward from the line of timber is the wide prairie, whose swelling undulations are covered with a lavish growth of wild flowers each succeeding summer. Down the river about a mile is the foreman's cabin; here

also are the branding pens and cattle corrals, and it is here that the hands working the range congregate, the old double log-cabin serving for shelter from rain and storm, and here that the camp cook prepares their meals for them.

To the south of the main resident buildings lay the fields where grew the produce that supplied this thrifty ranchman's household. It was here that the peons tended the fields of maize, peas, potatoes, tobacco, and smaller garden produce. On the uplands to the northwest, the shepherds tended the sheep. There was no stockade about any of his buildings, for the mightiest tribe of Indians roaming those western plains were his friends, and the renegade white thieves and cattle rustlers, whose fingers itched for spoils, smothered their longings and stayed their hands, because of the swift punishment that had been meted out to some of their bolder comrades, who had tried the hazard of encroaching upon the "Big Sachem," now sleeping so peacefully beneath the shade of the huge live-oak, with the sweet breath of the morning breeze playing about him.

A sudden clatter of horses' feet, dashing along the highway, aroused the sleeper, who smiled in his wakening at the sound of a merry peal of girlish laughter, followed by the deep tones of a man's voice whose speech bore a strong Spanish accent, as he challenged his comrade for another race.

"No, Antone, your cayuse is no match for Red

Calf; better hopple the poor brute out on the grass and saddle up a fresh one."

The man laughed at her raillery in a good-natured way, as he vaulted from his saddle and opened the gate for her to ride into the yard.

"Just keep on snoozin', padre. Antone did look so funny a-hangin' onto the back of that buckin' cayuse, that I couldn't keep from laughin'," the girl exclaimed.

Throwing the bridle reins over her pony's neck, she left him to feed upon the grass, and taking Antone by the hand she led him toward her father where he still sat in the big chair under the shade tree. Her face was covered with smiles as she suppressed her laughter, and she bowed low as she said: "I'll introduce to you Mr. Antone Xamino, the great broncho buster." Releasing her captive she flung her arms about her father's neck and began telling him of their long ride and the hairbreadth escapes of Antone, with the fiery mustang he was breaking.

Two women came out on the veranda at the sound of the merriment under the trees. They were Senora Hackett and her friend, Dona Xamino, from San Antonio, who, with her two sons, was making her accustomed yearly visit to her friends on the ranch.

Antone, finding himself released, dropped upon the ground, sitting with his feet doubled under him, camp fashion, and began fanning himself vigorously with his wide-brimmed hat. His disheveled hair and loosened collar and cuffs

gave signs of the great exertion through which he had just passed.

"Couldn't you stick him, Antone?" questioned Hackett, as he gave vent to a half-lazy laugh from the depths of his big, rawhide-bottomed chair.

"Yes, I stuck him—but oh!" shaking his head ruefully and looking down between his feet with a deep groan of affected misery.

The girl had disappeared from the group, and as she rounded the corner of the house she made for the kitchen where old black Mandy was preparing dinner.

"I am hungry as a wolf, Mandy; give me something to eat."

"Lor' bless my life, chile, don't cum a-bodering me; dis chicken pie mus' git in de oven, er de quality won't hab no dinnah," said Mandy. But when the girl came forth from the kitchen she carried a generous slice of bread and butter.

CHAPTER XXI

"Oh give me a home, where the buffalo roam,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where never is heard a discouraging word,
And the sky is not cloudy alway."

So sang the blithe voice of one among a large bunch of cowboys who were rallying around the camp fire at the foreman's cabin on Trail Creek, waiting for their evening meal, and nagging Miss Sallie, the cook—so called on account of the feminine trend of his present occupation. They belonged to the Shackleford ranch, and were congregated here to receive orders from the foreman.

Some were planning for a winter's rusticating in town, while others were busy mending lariats, hopples, and saddles. These were the fellows who were to remain with the cattle through the winter to keep them from "drifting" when the northers began to blow over the range, carrying their blizzards of sleet and cold, nipping at the hides of the cattle, and driving them to seek shelter in the cedar brakes and in the timber along the streams. These men who remained were the "trusties"; those going were the boys who worked on the range during the spring and summer round-ups. Merrily the cowboy sang, and right merrily did his comrades chaff him in

half-bantering tones. Pete Burrows, a sort of spokesman for the younger crowd of boys, ventured the remark: "You'll not feel quite so frisky when the cussed redskins make you slip your cayuse into his best mettle to save your scalp."

"To h—— with the redskins; who's afeard uv a herd like 'em!" returned the singer.

His words reached the ears of Buck Jennings, the foreman, who was busily engaged talking to a big fellow who sat upon the ground mending his saddle and talking with the foreman about the scare the redskins were just then giving the settlers. "It hain't goin' to be much uv a flare-up," said he; "the devils may run off a lot uv beef cattle, but it's the wimmen and children I'm a thinkin' uv more'n the cattle."

There was a troubled and half-serious look shadowing the foreman's face; he was wondering to himself if he was doing just the wisest thing in letting so many of the boys break camp before the Indian scare had fully subsided.

Hardly had he broken off his train of thought when two cowboys, who had not yet joined the main crowd, came dashing into camp, their mustangs foam-flecked, themselves hatless and their hair flying wildly in the wind. Every man was on his feet in a second, his fire-arms at his side. The story told by the newcomers was of a close chase given them by some bloodthirsty Comanches who were at that time indulging in one of their feverish uprisals. The report of the two

cowboys also showed that the Indians chasing them were only a small portion of a main body of warriors who were traveling eastward toward the settlements. "Miss Sallie," the cook, served the men a hurried supper. Half an hour later, each with a camp kit and provisions buckled on his bronchos, they rode swiftly in the direction where the two cowboys had last seen the moving throng of Indian warriors, and from there they took a circuitous course to reach the settlements, seeking to head off the Indians.

The title of cowboy should not be applied to all men who have taken an active part in handling cattle, but to those only who have proven themselves worthy of the name of such as rode the range of long ago. That much-abused term, "Texas cowboy," is often used by Eastern people who in all truth have known little of the real goodness of heart, simplicity, and brave courage of those roistering, jolly cowboys of long ago. Not faultless—no—for they were human and full of the great big heart that throbs in the breast of every big-souled man and woman. I don't claim for them anything but what is rightfully theirs; and in view of their peculiar surroundings, temptations, associations, and privations they were exceptional characters—those cowboys of the free range days on the plains of southwest Texas. They possessed qualities both useful and ornamental in any station of life. Don't understand by this that I mean the entire fraternity, for "black

sheep" had crept into the fold from the "neutral ground" beyond the Sabine—that mother ground of the thieves and cut-throats who raided the colonists and forced Stephen F. Austin to establish the first lynch law, when he commanded his colonists to seek and find their property, which they should bring back, but to leave the thief by the roadside. To me the Texas cowboy is as I saw and knew him in the long ago. He is a true, big-hearted, whole-souled bundle of humanity, kind-hearted, generous to a fault, and with the qualities of the gentleman born in him. Perhaps a little lax at times about his mode of applying his branding iron, but it was one of the invariable laws of that day and time to "get even;" and with but very few exceptions he was a neighbor of whom to be proud. You knew when you entered his home you were welcome; he had nothing too good to divide. You could sense an air of freedom pervading his home that inaudibly but positively breathed you a hearty welcome. No need to expect him to neglect any of his duties to entertain you, for he would not; but you had the freedom of the place, be it large or small. A twenty-mile ride on a rainy night to bring a doctor for a sick friend or neighbor, or to go to the relief of a distressed human being, worked no hardship on him. All he needed to know was that there was suffering that needed his help. If a friend or associate was ever so far "misunderstood" as to get arrested, he went to his rescue and, as a rule, was able to secure

for him a verdict of "not guilty." If some unfortunate came to him who was in danger of being "pulled," he would rustle up the best stray horse to be found on the range, borrow a saddle from some sheep man—provided the owner was away—and filling him up with the best provender he could find, give him some of his spare cash and a little "meetin'-house" advice and tell him to mount, lean to and shove.

There was another—the roaming "come day, go day, God send Sunday," good-natured, easy-going cowboy, who was happy wherever he was; who cared for nothing but a good saddle, spurs, and quirt, and a forty-dollar job; seldom aspiring to accumulate anything for himself, content to spend his life working for some one else, and when the season for working cattle on the range was over, he would repair to the nearest town and spend all he had earned in having a good time. Men of this latter class were ofttimes manipulated in many ways by the more astute cattlemen in whose employ they might chance to be, for, as a rule, they would do for him what they would fear to do for themselves, and too often has it been the case, when the "boss" was in too close a place, he would, in order to save himself, slip the head of some pliable dupe into the halter that justice had designed for his own, and never feel a qualm of conscience, as he lived in the daily conviction that all he did was on the dead square.

It was such fellows as these that followed

Buck Jennings, Shackleford's foreman, as they rode to the relief of the settlements.

Just the day before the scenes just described at the foreman's cabin on Trail Creek took place, a dust-covered, gaunt, half-starved Comanche Indian came to Fort Stockton with the news that the settlements were to be destroyed by the Indians who were on the warpath again. It was Lieutenant Fairfax who met him and first interviewed him. He knew the Indian, and had often seen him at one of the settlement stores, and knew he was Little Fox, a Comanche brave, and as the lieutenant could speak the Comanche language easily the Indian was given over into his charge. Before the redskin would tell his errand, he drew from the ranger a solemn promise that he would protect him from the vengeance of his tribe. The lieutenant proceeded to assure him that he would be protected from his fellow-tribesmen, and once the Indian began talking he told quickly the one thing that had brought him, without sleep or drink, to the ranger's camp.

"Chief tell warriors Great Spirit call red men. Hear! 'Dig up hatchet and kill all palefaces.' Great Spirit say: 'Kill palefaces; burn ranch houses.' Red man come back from happy hunting ground and bring buffalo; all belong to red man. So say chief to his braves. Little Fox steal 'way and come to tell; go save white squaw and papooses!"

The lieutenant listened to him quietly until he

had told his story; then asked, "When is this to take place?" "The time is here," he said. "To-night give signal; braves burn and kill." "And the signal?" asked Fairfax. "Three heap fires on Eagle Butte when night half dead," the Indian replied.

The lieutenant immediately dispatched a courier to the United States troops, and was soon leading his company of rangers toward the settlements beyond the Pecos. The company was well mounted, and every man of them a hard rider, but morning found them, after a long night's ride, with no Indians in sight. They struck camp on the banks of a creek to breakfast and for a short hour's rest for their horses, which were considerably fagged. They were far to the north of Trail Creek, where Shackleford's foreman held his camp, and the Indians had passed south of Trail Creek, making for the lower settlements. It was thus that Lieutenant Fairfax failed to get in the wake of the moving army of redskins again that day. It was with deep chagrin that the ranger lieutenant realized at nightfall that a whole day and night had passed without any effectual move having been made by him and his men to intercept the Indians. He thought of his mother and the loved ones at home, and his face paled, his lips tightened, and digging his spurs deep into his horse's side he rode before his men like a sweeping wind, leading them at a mad pace, with no thought of

the dripping horses lathered with sweat, yet tireless under the saddle.

As they began to near the settlements they found along the way smoking piles of burning debris marking the destruction of a lone ranchman's hut or cabin, but no trace or sign of mutilated bodies met the searching eyes of the rangers at any of the demolished homes. "They have captured them and are driving their prisoners before them for breastworks," was Fairfax's decision which he communicated to his men, who mounted their horses and followed him as he rode faster and faster with each successive mile.

Buck Jennings and his band of cowboys had ridden just a few hours ahead of Fairfax and his company of rangers, gathering the settlers as they went, riding double, and carrying bareheaded children in their arms whom they had snatched from the ground as they were at play, as they rode their mad chase with death. About midnight Lieutenant Fairfax and his men arrived at the main Shackleford ranch, and their hearts were filled with gladness when they found it swarming with the settlers who had been brought to the safety of the heavy stockade surrounding the Shackleford home.

"Sure, me lad, and is it yerself that is safe in the arms of yer mither?" cried the lieutenant's mother as she flung her arms about his neck; and the color came back into her fear-blanched face.

"Yes, mother, and right glad I am to find the settlers safe behind the stockades. I have been so troubled about the women and the children and your own dear self. How fares it with all of you here at home?" His arm encircled her waist as they walked away from the throng of frightened men, women and children.

"Sure, and its all day they have been coming in like this, me lad, and niver a place to give the poor souls to lay their heads, so full has the house been, and then we thought to make pallets for the bairns out here on the grass; but niver a bloody redskin has come in sight yit."

He tightened his arm about her waist as he said, "I thank God that you are safe, mother; and grandfather, how is he?"

"Sure, me lad, and he is all right, and ye jist come this way an' see fur yez own self." And she led the way to where "Daddy" Shackleford was quietly resting, fearing no danger now that Buck and the boys were holding the stockade.

In glad, welcoming tones he cried out, as Allan and his mother approached him:

"A double welcome, my lad; now I can rest my old bones and sleep that I know you are to lead the men. Buck and you can whip your weight in wild cats. Line up the boys, every man uv 'em, and if the red devils storm the stockade give 'em h——. Aye, Malindy, it's the blood uv his father in 'im—a man who lived on the dead square and died game at the last, one

of the brave heroes of the Alamo, and a Virginia gentleman. Always remember that, my boy!"

A kind, indulgent smile played over the lieutenant's face as he listened to the old man's words, and grasping his hand with a strong grip, he replied: "I thank you sincerely; and now I must go and look after the barricades and see that all is made ready; but I can't understand how our company could have missed the redskins, for we were right on their trail the last few miles. Probably they have hid themselves until we are off guard, and then aim to make a midnight rush on the barricades."

"Keep out the pickets, lad; don't let them take you by surprise; and if they come, give 'em h——!" At the last words "Daddy" lay back on his pillow, resting from the fatigue and excitement of the day that had just waned.

The ranch, with its people back of the stockade, rested until morning under double guard, with no interruption from the enemy. At the first break of day, Lieutenant Fairfax led a reconnoitering party across the plains, in the direction of the distant timber, along the range of low sand dunes, outlined against the horizon to the west. Striking no trail of the Indians after a couple of hours' hard riding, the rangers returned to the ranch, bringing with them a bunch of fat beef cattle, which were driven inside of the stockade to be slaughtered as they were needed. About one hundred and fifty families were congregated at the ranch, and with but

few exceptions they had all been made homeless by the destructive horde of Indians sweeping over the country. Fairfax and his uncle, young Ben Shackleford, directed the men in butchering and barbecuing three of the fattest beeves. The children were crying with hunger, and their mothers were looking worn and famished from the trying day and night of dread they had passed through. Mrs. Fairfax kept the big iron ovens over a bed of bright coals, and with the help of a number of the women she baked bread for the crowd. There were milk, butter and eggs, but the men left them for the women and children, confining themselves to the barbecued meats, black coffee and unleavened bread.

The first signal of danger came just at the close of the mid-day meal, by the firing of the pickets' guns outside the stockade. The guards came dashing into the stockade, and quickly the portal was closed by the placing of the heavy barricade. The women and children were rushed into the house for protection from the flying arrows, and then the men took to the portholes in the stockades.

As Lieutenant Fairfax swept the wide plain in every direction with a long, searching gaze, he thanked his grandfather with inward devoutness for his astuteness in establishing his ranch in the center of the vast, wide plain, making it almost impossible for an enemy to approach without discovery. To the right of the north stockade could be seen a large army of mounted

Indians, bearing swiftly down upon the buildings and stockades. Fairfax waited until they were in close range and then gave the order to fire. Simultaneously with the order he had given came the report of the guns at the portholes, the foremost Indians leading the advance attack reeling from their saddles. Those following met with the same rebuff; then came a lull in the attack, during which the rangers saddled their horses and made ready for a general onslaught. Buck Jennings and his intrepid cowboys followed in the movements of the rangers; then all waited for the next attack. From his point of observation at the top of the stockade Lieutenant Fairfax saw a dim line moving toward the ranch from the direction of the distant sand dunes to the west. He left his pilothouse and went back to his men, directing them for the oncoming attack, and then stationed himself at his porthole in the stockade. Afar in the distance could be heard the bloodcurding "hi—yip—yei!" of the cut-throats, followed by the shrill Comanche war cry at every jump of their horses. The band was four hundred strong, composed of Comanches, Kiowas, and Arapahoes. The attack was stubborn, and lasted for over an hour, but at last, the fire from behind the stockade getting too hot for them, they left their dead and wounded and broke for the shelter of the sand hills. Tearing away the barricade of the portal the mounted men rode through and followed in hot pursuit. The barricade was re-

placed by the few men who were left to watch guard at the stockade, while the main body rode on in close chase of the fleeing Indians. It was a running fight for several miles, the Indians in the lead and drifting southward. As night came on the rangers pressed their chase harder, their horses now and then leaping over or shying at the body of a fallen Indian, whose escape had been checked by the bullets from their guns. Across the dry, alkali desert, in the glimmering moonlight, rode the two bodies of men like mad demons chasing each other. Fairfax realized that the leaders were endeavoring to get their army into the timber of the valley below, and to weaken their force he gave orders to his men to cut the number down as small as possible before they reached the timber.

By the light of the full moon it was easy for the practised eye of each man in the chase to distinguish the fleeing foe, and each time they came in close range a volley was poured into the redskins, who were left where they fell, grappling in the white, alkali scurf covering the scarred face of the desert. As morning was breaking the Indians made a desperate dash for the timber, which they were now nearing, and once under cover they turned upon their pursuers and gave fight. The rangers charged into the woods after them and a hard battle ensued, one of the rangers being killed and a couple of them wounded. Two of Buck Jennings' boys were wounded, and several of the Indians killed, and

those left fled from the scene of the conflict and scattered through the woods.

Couriers had been sent to warn the settlers in the valley, and many of them had been conducted to Hackett's ranch. All day men and women on horseback and carrying their children in their arms rode after the scouts, who were ordered by Hackett to bring them to his ranch. News of the Indian uprisal had spread throughout the valley, carrying dismay and fear to the hearts of the people in the settlements, and leaving home and everything, they fled to the nearest place of safety. Hackett's grounds and home were overrun with them, but to each fresh arrival a cordial welcome was given them to abide there until the danger was over. The rangers struck camp on a green flat at the edge of the timber, to make sure none of the Indians could crawl through the tall grass and steal upon them unawares.

With Jennings' band added to the rangers, the squad numbered one hundred and fifty men, and the cowboys employed at the Montezuma ranch swelled the number to two hundred. The night passed by without any sign of the Indians. The guards had been placed less than ten feet apart, making it impossible for an Indian to pass the lines; and as morning dawned new courage came to the people huddled together for self-protection. The awfulness that goes with any

night peril left them as the warm September sunshine spread its benediction over them, while they watched and waited for their danger to pass away.

CHAPTER XXII

The days were warm and delightful—not too warm—and a blue haze hung over everything. An Indian spy who had been captured by Fairfax's squadron was brought into camp, and under the fear of immediate death was made to reveal the movements of the warlike tribes. He was of the Arapahoe tribe, the hereditary allies of the Cheyennes, and who at that time were amalgamating with the Comanches. Under the rigid discipline given him the Indian revealed the fact that only half of the warriors were in the body making the attack on the settlements. The Cheyennes were gathering en masse to join the disorganized band that had been driven before the hot firing of Fairfax's squadron. The weather was glorious, not a cloud to be seen anywhere, only a blue haze hanging like floating, vapory robes over everything. Reconnoitering parties went out in search of the enemy, but no trace of Indians could be found. Only the hardy plainsmen, who so well understood the wily nature of the Indians, could detect any sinister meaning in their ominous silence, and Fairfax's soul was burdened with dread for the safety of the North Settlements.

While they were still inactive, waiting the approach of the enemy, a squad of United States

troops joined them, leaving the larger number of the company to guard the upper settlements. The lieutenant breathed with deep relief as he realized that his loved ones would be doubly protected.

Hackett had joined in the eager search for the ambushed Indians, hoping to be able to treat with them, as had been his custom in the past. The scouting parties that had gone out had discovered many of the settlers' homes laid waste by the fire-brand, at the hand of the skulking Indians. This fact had destroyed in Hackett's mind all thought of forbearance. He had put the captured spy under a rigid course of cross-examination, seeking to learn why the Comanches were breaking their compact with him of continued peace. After a long, rigorous examination the Indian said: "Big Sachem no longer love red brother. Let white brother kill buffalo; braves no like it; squaws, papooses have no meat. Great Spirit say, 'Kill pale-face; burn ranch houses.' Red man come back; bring buffalo—heap many, more'n is now." With the stolid look of his race the Indian gazed steadily before him when he ceased speaking, and not another word could be drawn from him.

Hackett realized he was face to face with the meanest element of the Indian nature. Their jealousy had been roused by his friendship with the white settlers, who had been killing their buffalo, antelope, and deer. He realized also that he had come to the parting of the ways. No

longer could he handle the red man with gloves as he had done in the past, and, despite their savagery, he felt within his soul that their rights were being encroached upon in the willful slaughter of their game. Nevertheless, he determined that rather than be exterminated by them, they should themselves be exterminated.

During the encampment of the rangers at the Montezuma ranch, Lieutenant Fairfax saw a great deal of his little friend who had cooked the mid-day meal for him up there on the desert. She had the freedom of the place, and wandered where her fancy might list, so long as she kept out of the range of danger. A shy timidity had crept into her manner with Lieutenant Fairfax. She had spied him among his troops at his first appearance at the ranch. She had approached him with an honorable salute, and taking him by the hand had led him to her father, and in her own peculiar way explained to him that Fairfax was the ranger lieutenant she had told him about meeting and cooking dinner for in the desert. Hackett grasped his hand in cordial greeting, Fairfax feeling instinctively that he could like the man, while he looked into his face and listened to his deep, kind voice as he said: "I have known you a long time, lad; saw you when you were first in your cradle, at your father's home in San Antonio. After the battle of San Jacinto I helped to bring you and your mother to your grandfather's home. You were a boy of twelve when I saw you next; Ben was starting

with you for the East, to place you in school at Wheeling. That was the last time I saw you; but I see why they have called you 'Young Allan,' for you are the image of your father, man!" He slapped the shoulder of the lieutenant with his broad, open palm, a glad smile beaming over his big, good-natured face. With a more serious air he continued: "They tell me Ben is getting feeble; I hope it is not true. He must hold out as long as I do, for we are the two oldest landmarks of earlier days in, around and about San Antonio."

The lieutenant assured him that his grandfather was exceptionally well for his advanced age, and still proud of the fact that his son-in-law was a Virginia gentleman. The same broad smile spread over the ranchman's face as the lieutenant brought back to his mind his old friend's peculiar vanity.

The lieutenant found the road to the "big house" across the way from his camp quite often, ostensibly to confer with its owner about the chief attraction filling all their minds, but in reality in the hope of seeing the little elfin-like creature who had stolen his heart away. Just as often would Chiketa manufacture some excuse to visit the camp. Hackett at last succeeded in getting into communication with the leading Comanche chief. The pow-wow was ineffectual; the cut-throats would agree to no measures, but wanted the whites to leave the settlements. The red monarch withdrew with his

warriors, all wearing gorgeous war bonnets and carrying their brilliant battle pennants. The afternoon of the same day saw a heavy stockade enclosing the buildings of Hackett's ranch, while the United States troops and the rangers went out in a body to meet the Indians, attack them and scatter them before nightfall. As the troops rode over the crest of a swell of the prairie they saw coming toward them a large body of Indians, all mounted, and giving the shrill Cheyenne war-cry with every jump of their horses. Out from the moving body of troopers rode one, his bugle went to his lips, and the next instant the thrilling notes of the "charge" were ringing far and near. The two bodies met in desperate conflict, the Indians stubbornly resisting, and the troops, despite the poisoned arrows flying thickly about them, charging through the line and breaking the flanks of the redskins, who were some nine hundred strong. At close quarters the club and the tomahawk supplanted the bow and arrows with the Indians, while the short saber and bayonet of the troops did the work of their carbines at long range. The stubbornness of the Indians began to weaken under the steady downpour of death dealt out to them from the hands of the disciplined troops. Those who were not killed were captured, with some loss to the soldiers. Many of their horses received poisoned arrows in their bodies and had to be killed to prevent a slow, lingering death. Gray Eagle, the Co-

manche chief who had refused to treat for peace with Hackett and the settlers, was quite a different personage when he found himself dismantled of his robes and war paint, his warriors-bold slain and trampled.

"Me make peace; me make peace!" he kept reiterating, as he moved in front of the soldiers toward the ranch, the point of Fairfax's bayonet touching him in the back. "Me talk Big Sachem?" requested the warrior as he reached the ranch, his eyes searching eagerly for the form of Hackett.

All night the captured Indians were held under heavy guard; the following morning Gray Eagle signed a treaty of perpetual peace, and, with his captured warriors, he was conducted under guard of the United States troops beyond the confines of the white settlements and set free, ending for the time the war of the Comanches, Arapahoes and Cheyennes on the settlements. Little Fox was nauseated, and spat on the ground to show his disgust when he heard of the peace treaty. "White man heap damn fool. Indian make lots peace promise; break 'em all. Damn fool, white man; never learn. Believe 'gain. Oh much damn fool."

Lieutenant Fairfax had delivered the Indian prisoners over to the United States troops to be disposed of, and with his troopers he searched the country around Hackett's ranch for any lurking redskins that might have escaped and might return to molest the people there. Once

convinced the danger had passed over, the people returned to their homes where they had not been destroyed, and where they had been pillaged and burned by the Indians, the more fortunate lent a helping hand in rearing new cabins for the unfortunates. When the day came for the rangers to take leave and break camp Hackett rode with them for the first few miles. He thanked the lieutenant for his great courage in protecting his home and his family, and urged him to come back and visit him.

"I would like to come back, Mr. Hackett," said the young Texan, in a straightforward, manly way. "I would like to come back and visit with you in your home and woo and win your daughter for my wife, for I have loved her with all my soul since that first day I met her under the burning sun up there on the desert."

"Oh—ah—well, you see—the fact is, lad, she —well, there are two of you, and whichever wins her—why, I've naught to say."

"I understand," said Fairfax; "you mean the Mexican in San Antonio—Xamino, whose father was a close friend of my father."

"The same, lad, the same. Did Chiketa tell you about him?" questioned Hackett, completely nonplussed by the turn affairs were taking.

"No! Every one knows it, and knows also how hard he strives to spend as much of his time at your ranch as possible, that he may be near her. However, I do not believe your daughter

loves him except as a good comrade, and I will eagerly enter the suit for her hand if I may secure your permission."

"Go right ahead, my lad. I couldn't refuse you if Chiketa wants you to come."

"She knows that I intended to ask your permission to come back and see her, and she has told me in word and manner, Mr. Hackett, that I shall be welcome when I come."

The anxious manner and the persuasive words of the handsome lieutenant remained with Hackett as he rode back toward his home, and he found himself wishing that it might be true, and that his daughter could love Fairfax best. "For, somehow I am afraid Antone has a violent temper when roused," the anxious father told himself. For several days after the departure of the ranging company Chiketa was very quiet, having but little to say to any one. Hackett had spoken to his wife, repeating to her his interview with Fairfax, and together they kept watch over the girl, who seemed so different in her manner. It was so unlike her to sit quietly watching the far-off sky line, her chin buried in her hands, her elbows resting on her knees.

"The fever has got her—I am sure of it, wife—and we may as well make the best of it. We will have to give her up to the one she loves, and I hope it will be Fairfax that wins her, for I am afraid of Antone's temper."

"Oh, padre, Antone is a good boy; it is only his father's warm blood in his veins that drives

him to do such odd things. Remember, it was his father who helped us escape from Cortez and that dreaded Quinta. It is our duty to help Antone win her, for his father befriended us in the hour of peril." By the mother's words it was plain to be seen that she preferred Antone should win her daughter's love.

"Why not let Chiketa speak for herself?" asked the father. "We will speak to her of the two men in different ways, and if she loves either her face will tell her story."

He walked out on the porch to where the girl sat looking with non-seeing eyes into far-distant space. It was a beautiful September day; the temper of the southern sun, and the sweetness of its tropic perfumes filled the air and lay like a golden mantle on grass, trees, and flowers. As he approached her where she sat, deeply buried in moody, abstract thought, he said: "Would you like to go back to the convent to school, Chiketa? You are getting to be quite a young lady, and old enough to learn to play the melodeon. Don't you think Antone would be glad to see you come back to San Antonio to go to school?"

The girl sitting on the door step gave a petulant movement at the mention of Antone's name. "I don't want to go to school; I don't want to go back to San Antonio; I just want to be all by myself and think and think," replied the girl, a little husky note in her voice.

"Are you tired of Red Calf, and of your

mother, and me, and of the wild flowers you have always loved so well?" her father continued.

Until now her shoulder had been turned toward him as though she would like to ward off intrusion, but at his last words she threw him a quick, darting look over her shoulder, and a smile lit up the big, solemn black eyes.

"Are you afraid there are more Indians hiding in the hollows, that you ride your pony no more? I will have to send for Lieutenant Fairfax to bring back his rangers and scour the country again, to convince you all danger is over."

At the mention of Fairfax's name the girl sprang to her feet as an antelope springs from covert, and dashing to her father's side she threw her arms about his neck, covering his face with kisses first, then said: "I am not afraid of the Indians; the settlers shouldn't kill and destroy their game; let them kill only what they need for meat. They are killing all the buffalo so they sell the hides, and leaving the carcasses to rot over the plains. But, padre, when do you think the rangers will be back?" twining her small hand in his long, flowing beard as she put the coaxing question.

"Oh, I can't tell; never again I hope on the same errand they came last. That handsome lieutenant told me he was coming back soon, just to pay us a visit, you know."

"Did he, padre?" she gasped, as she tightened her arms about his neck in a little whirl of ecstat-

ic delight, stamping her little foot to give emphasis to her inward delight.

"Yes!" replied her father, the man within him feeling pleasant over the suspense he was giving her, as he proceeded to fill his pipe, feeling sure that those kisses she had given him rightfully belonged to the lieutenant. She took the pipe quickly from his hands, filled it with rapidly moving fingers, ran for a live coal of fire, lit the pipe, and gave long, vigorous puffs at the pipe stem as she hurried back to her father with it. She thrust the stem into her father's mouth, saying: "Be quick, padre; draw hard!"

After a few draws at the pipe Hackett decided to relieve her, and removing his pipe he began talking again about the rangers and about Lieutenant Fairfax. Suddenly she threw her arms about his neck again, and in a quick, nervous way she declared, "Oh, padre, you are the best old darling that ever lived in this world. I love you. I love you," and rained her kisses down on his face.

"Another one for Fairfax," he inwardly told himself. She crawled up on his lap and crowded into the chair beside him. "Do you like the lieutenant, Chiketa?" questioned her father.

"Oh, padre, he is so strong and so kind; and oh, how he can ride—just like the rising of the wind when it sweeps over the tall grasses and makes them bend low, and then rushes on like mad, swirling the dust and heaping it into the

big sand dunes on the plains." She was nervously gesturing as she spoke.

"Is he a better rider than Antone?" The question brought forth her mirth, for she recalled Antone's first, last, and only effort to "bust the broncho" as she termed the feat. "Why do you laugh and make ridicule of Antone letting the broncho outwind him? Don't you like Antone?"

"Y-e-s," yawning, and then again, "Antone is a good roper, but"—another yawn—"oh, padre, I am so sleepy," and her head drooped until it rested against him. He moved his seat a trifle to make her more comfortable, and half lifting her head she questioned, sleepily, "When do you think Lieutenant Fairfax will come, padre?"

"Oh, he'll be along some day when we are not expecting him." She gave a little happy chuckle and fell asleep.

"Her story is told!" said Hackett to himself. The senora had been standing near them, and coming forward with a light footfall, she looked into her husband's face, now beaming with a soft, indulgent smile, his eyes full of love for his sweetheart, wife, and the mother of his child.

CHAPTER XXIII

"Love is sunshine, hate is shadow,
Life is checkered shade and sunshine.
Rule by love, oh Hiawatha!"

The wind blew strong, playing low among the grasses and singing a shrill morning song. There was a twang of wildness in the breeze, and a sense of freedom, wild and sweet, coming from over the wide, grassy plains. Riding swiftly along the narrow trail leading across country in a southerly direction, we again see Lieutenant Fairfax. He has left the fort far behind him, and is riding swiftly toward the southern settlements. But a few short weeks have elapsed since he rode this way at another time, but he is riding the same road again to-day, and it is love that is calling him.

With a leave of absence from his company, he is returning to the Montezuma ranch to win his bride. Antone Xamino is equally as anxious to win in the same tilt at love, and, like many a fond lover, is making the great mistake of perpetually shadowing his lady-love, of following continually in her wake. So it is with him to-day, in his persistent love-making, as he follows closely at Chiketa's side to different points of interest about the ranch. They had ridden down to the old mission church, ten miles away. Together

they viewed the old battle-scarred ruins, with nothing left now but the walls of what had once been a fortress for the good friars, seeking to civilize and educate the Indians.

When they had finished their explorations, and had mounted their ponies and started on their return home, Antone began talking to the girl of his great love for her, and urging her to name the day when she would be willing to marry him.

"I am not going to marry you at all!" declared the girl, bluntly, her words striking to the youth's heart like a broad slap in the face.

For several moments he rode on in silence, a dull, red flame slowly rising beneath the olive of his cheek. "Are you going back to the convent school?" he questioned, for he had no thought of a rival, so long had he been master of the field.

"I am not going to school any more," she informed him, as with uplifted head she sniffed at the fine morning breeze.

A slow smile of amusement played over the youth's face, as he gave her a sidelong glance. "Oh, you're a young lady now—finished school?" His half-questioning tones tantalized her.

"It's all because I like the prairie, the wild flowers, my pony, and the long, long rides with the padre after the cattle, better than the convent walls. The senora and padre will not make me go back to school, if I do not want to go."

Her words were spoken with a little touch of defiance in her tones, looking at him as she spoke, through half-closed lids, and her chin slightly tilted upwards.

"I don't think you like me anymore, Chiketa," he said, the wide rim of his sombrero sheltering from her view the red flame in his face.

"Oh, I like you, Antone; you would make a jolly good brother, but I don't want any sweetheart. I don't want to get married and grow ugly and stupid and fat like the Spanish women down in San Antonio."

"Senora Hackett has not grown ugly, or stupid, or fat either, and girls are often like their mothers when they grow older!"

As though seeking to ride away from something unpleasant, she dug her pony's sides with her little silver spurs, springing away in a long, swinging gallop, the tall grass sweeping the sides of her pony as it bent from the evening breeze.

All day had Lieutenant Fairfax ridden across country in the same swift, steady gait, stopping to noon on the banks of a stream he crossed. Tethering his horse out to graze and for a short hour's rest, he proceeded to spread out the blanket to dry, and then throwing himself upon the grass he let his mind drift into speculation upon the future. Suddenly a low, muffled sound, like the falling of many waters, fell upon his ears. It came from a far distance and he could not locate the direction. As he listened attentively,

it dawned upon him that it was the midst of the mating season for the buffalo, and that he must be nearing one of the big herds that watered regularly at the fords of the Pecos River. A snort from his horse where he was tethered to graze brought Fairfax to his feet with a bound. Sweeping the space before him everywhere with a searching, alert gaze he saw nothing, but still his horse reared and plunged at the stake rope. He hurried to his horse and on close examination he found an immense rattlesnake half trampled to death, but still trying to spring at the horse. With his revolver Fairfax quickly dispatched the rattler, and after petting and soothing his horse into a quieter mood, he buckled on his saddle and resumed his journey, with less than three-quarters of an hour's rest. Upon nearing the river the muffled noise grew into a loud thundering roar. Fording the river above the location of the tumult, the lieutenant rode out upon a slight elevation, and with his field glass looked in the direction from whence came that steady roar that held no variation save a slight undertone of hissing.

In the broad bottoms between the river and the sand-hills to the south he saw a herd of nearly three thousand buffalo, the whole mass covering the broad bottoms. He rode closer, until with his field glass he could see and distinguish their movements. Now they ran here, then there, then the whole body of them would run together until they were so solidly packed

that the heads had to be elevated to prevent suffocation. Then suddenly the outside ring would scatter, relieving the pressure in the center, and the whole mass would again be in constant ferment. Desperate battles between massive bulls were being fought. The fight never stopped till one fell and was quickly gored or trampled to death, or until one gave way and ran, a picture of bloody misery. As Fairfax lowered his field glass and rode on his way (though perfectly familiar with such scenes), he could not forbear the conclusion, that the whole buffalo tribe had suddenly gone mad. It had gone mad, but it was the insanity that among men is called, and justly so, "the divine madness." At the beginning of these buffalo riots, a low, strange sound is first noticed, like the sound of an earthquake which seems to be stationed everywhere—in the earth and in the air. It is the most unearthly sound ever heard by man, with its wierd, omnipresent, and unchanging sound, continuing for two months without rising or falling or even subsiding in the slightest manner—that bellowing of thousands upon thousands of the buffalo bulls, far and near, their number so great that it is one steady, sullen roar, until the ear of man, becoming accustomed, ceases to give heed, save as to the sound of many falling waters.

As Lieutenant Fairfax was riding in a swinging gallop late in the evening, each mile he reeled off bringing him closer and closer to the Hackett

ranch, he was suddenly startled in his train of thought as a fine bunch of antelope sprang from covert in the heart of a chaparral copse. With the swiftness of a skilled marksman he soon put one of the fleet-limbed beauties out of the fleeing herd. Springing from his saddle as he reached the spot where the wounded antelope lay, he drew his knife to more quickly dispatch his game. There was a look of death in the soft, dewy eyes turned upward to his. "It's done for; no need of that," he told himself, as the mute look in the dying eyes struck a chord of sympathy in his breast. Sheathing his knife he gave the dumb creature its few last moments in peace.

A last backward jerk of the head, and a sudden stiffening of the graceful limbs, and the fallen beauty was dead. Gathering the antelope and placing it on his horse at the front of his saddle, the lieutenant mounted and started on his way. Standing afar off and watching his movements were the remainder of the bunch of antelopes whose companion he was taking away. The sun was setting as he rode up to Hackett's gate; and as he threw his antelope across the fence he thought of the Dakota deer slayer, and the offering he brought for the purchase of his bride—beautiful Minnehaha. Pocketing his emotions as he caught sight of a slim slip of a girl beside the gateway, he carelessly lifted his hat, and then put forth his hand to greet her. She told him, rather than introduced him to the

youth by her side, "This is Antone, the boy I was tellin' you about up there on the desert the first day I met you."

"I have the pleasure, I believe, of meeting Senor Xamino," said Fairfax, as he put forth his hand a second time to give greeting. "Our fathers were great friends, I am told. I hope we may also be friends," he continued.

"Diablo, senor, the sons ofttimes differ from their fathers," ejaculated Antone, in his soft, Spanish accent.

"Right glad to see you, lieutenant," exclaimed Hackett, who had just come into their midst, following the heartily spoken words with a vigorous hand-shake. "Come into the house. Come into the house," he repeated. "The boys will take care of the game." And he leading the way, his guest followed.

"You called me a boy," said Antone, in protest. "I am as old as he is."

The girl's quizzical eyes looked him over searchingly, with her head slanting sideways.

"I don't know what it is, Antone, but he seems so much bigger than you. It is not in what you weigh," she said, as Antone looked himself over. "I mean inside of him, the part that makes other men mind and obey him, that part that leads the way and others follow. Do you understand?"

"The sir knight of the saddle, eh?" he questioned, half ironically. Continuing in the same tone, he said: "I doubt if anything more than

his bigness you like so well; and his horse and saddle belong to him!"

"Tsa!" hissed the girl, as she flung him a scorching look of anger. "What more does he need?"

"Money, if he would rank as one of Senor Hackett's friends, and be a guest at his hacienda," he said, in a low, tense tone.

"Where would you stand, Antone, if it had not been for the chest of gold you and Carlos found where your grandfather, the old Don, had buried it? Your gold was never earned by yourself. Lieutenant Fairfax is big enough to make gold for himself." With the last declaration she threw him a look of angry scorn, and fled into the house.

Hurrying to her mother's bedroom she consulted the oval looking-glass on the old walnut bureau. She looked at her pictured face steadily, searchingly. "Oh, if they would only stay down!" she cried to herself, as she patted and pulled at the black, unruly locks about her face and brow. She noted the sun-tan upon her cheek with deep chagrin, and vowed inwardly to doff the old slouch hat and take to the sunbonnet. For the fiftieth time she viewed herself after the desired change had been wrought. She had put aside the half smock, half blouse she had worn in the afternoon, and the voluminous leggins, gathered into a band at the knees to meet her little leathern gaiters, for one of the dresses she had worn while at the convent school, down in

San Antonio. The balloon-like leggins, smock, gaiters, and wide-awake hat were her favorite garb, and had been for so long that she was awkward and shy in the clinging skirts. The former gave her limbs freedom of movement in riding, roping, and helping the padre at the branding corrals, while the latter wound about her limbs and made her feel as the cayuses looked to her when wearing hopples.

The dress she picked from her scant store was an orange-colored baize, made with extremely plain skirt and bodice and long sleeves. The glorious black locks were dampened to make them smooth and glossy like the girls wore theirs at the convent, and that they might not become suddenly unruly without warning she fastened the dampened locks down with a band of black velvet. When she had completed her toilet she turned her mind conjecturingly toward her limited store of knowledge. "He must be awful smart; the padre said he was a graduate from the Virginia college. I wonder how smart a boy or girl I must be before they can graduate? Oh my, I wish I could play the melodeon!"

With a gasp of discouragement, as she realized her deficiencies, the troubled lass sat down and buried her face in her hands, suffering the keenest regret for lost opportunities. Only for a moment was she downcast. Suddenly springing to her feet, her face shining with a deep resolve, she threw one backward glance at the

grotesque figure in the old looking-glass, and feeling herself a very much dressed-up young lady, she inwardly commanded: "Forward, soldier, to the firing line of the battle-field!"

Senora Hackett was exceedingly pleased when her daughter entered the room a few moments later, where the lieutenant was being entertained by her and her husband. With great delight she noted the careful toilet Chiketa had made; the boyish garb she so persistently clung to was becoming a great source of worriment to the girl's mother. Hackett noted the change without seeming to see, but he understood it was the girl's effort to please the lieutenant, who had risen to his feet at her approach and given her his chair. Securing another for himself, he sat near her, dividing his conversation between the three until he felt the restraint which had become apparent at the girl's entrance into the room vanishing.

Antone sulked out by the gateway, where the men were cleaning and dressing the antelope brought in by the lieutenant. Already the demon of jealousy was lurking in his heart. He stood by while the men were working with the carcass they were dressing, but he looked on with unseeing eyes, for he was seeing another scene upon which he was looking with his inner gaze. His hands were thrust deep in his pockets, and a slight scowl gathered upon his dark, handsome face as he listened to the whisperings in his ear —undefinable whisperings as yet, with no dis-

tinct articulation. Chiketa had praised Lieutenant Fairfax and had ridiculed him. In that lay the sting of his decided dislike of the ranger from the start, and with no show for anything otherwise unless she retracts her words, he told himself. He was startled from his thoughts by the sound of Hackett's voice speaking to the men about the venison they were taking away to be hung up to dry.

"A fine specimen, Antone," exclaimed Hackett, as he spread the antelope hide across the fence. Antone nodded his head in the affirmative, and after a moment's silence he asked: "How long is Lieutenant Fairfax to be here, senor?"

"Antone, that is a long-ranged shot. I never asked even myself a question as to the length of a friend's stay when visiting in my home." He looked at Antone while speaking, the young man's face reddening under the rebuke.

The summons came for supper, by the clanging of an old Spanish church bell suspended from the bough of a giant live-oak near by the kitchen doorway. The kitchen stood apart from the main building, after the southern fashion, thus keeping all fumes of the cooking from the living apartments. It was the domain of black Mandy, who reigned supreme over all she surveyed. An open entry led from the kitchen to the dining-room, a big square room with low, raftered ceiling. Senora Hackett graced the head of the table and poured the coffee—that

favorite beverage at all meals of the natives of Mexico and universally adopted in the same manner by the Americans who had settled the Southwest—into the flaring, blue-ringed delf cups. Senor Hackett occupied the host's place at the foot of the table, generously supplying each and all with the good viands covering his plenteous board.

Antone gave Chiketa a questionable smile across the table from where he sat, as he noted the change in her attire. The girl gave him a look which said as plainly as the spoken words, "Mind your own business!" Nevertheless, she was keenly conscious that Antone was watching her with critical eyes, a fact which made her nervous and awkward. Fairfax saw the little by-play across the table, smiling quietly to himself as he caught the sly little grimace twisting Chiketa's face, as she sought to inform Antone of her keen displeasure under his scrutinizing gaze. He left the two to fight out the wordless battle, directing his conversation almost entirely to his host and hostess. After the evening meal he sat with his host out on the wide, cool piazza, where they smoked their pipes and talked of the earlier days on the range when the wild hill cattle were plentiful and the great herds of wild horses roamed the plains. Hackett's observant eye and active mind had gathered a wide fund of knowledge during his long life of adventure by sea and land. This, coupled with his genial, cordial manner and easy flow of speech, made

him a royal entertainer. Fairfax, an attentive listener at first, became fascinated and charmed with the narrations as they proceeded, and the two continued talking until far into the night. He knew that Antone and the girl were but a few feet from them, sitting in an angle of the porch, talking low to each other, during the earlier hours in the evening. At times their voices rose above the monotone in which they had been conversing, and would break upon the rich, resonant sound of his host's voice, and by their intonations he knew they were quarreling, and felt sure the bone of contention between them was his humble self and his sudden and unexpected appearance at the ranch; but this fact did not bother him nor alter his purpose. He would give them to-night, however, to come to an understanding, so he told himself, while he spent the evening listening to his host's interesting recitals of the adventurous days of the earlier Southwest. He knew when the senora came out on the veranda and joined the couple in the angle. She remained with them for a short half hour—the three talking together—and when she left the nook the girl was with her. For a moment the young man sat in sullen silence, when left alone, then flinging himself into a hammock, which hung from two of the low, heavy studdings of the porch, he wrapped himself again in utter silence.

It was past the midnight hour when the host and his guest rose from their seats to retire.

As Lieutenant Fairfax followed in the wake of his host, who was leading him to his room, he passed by the hammock where Antone lay. The moon was almost down, only the starlight shone over the sleeper, and the porch was darkened by the shadows of the trees. A regret stole into the lieutenant's heart that they should be rivals for the same girl's love—they whose fathers had both died together in the defense of the Alamo. Chiketa was fast asleep long ago, with her arms flung above her head in childish abandon, never dreaming that she was playing at marbles with precious stones.

CHAPTER XXIV

It was the round horse corrals with their snubbing posts in the center, and the branding pens for the cattle about the foreman's quarters, that marked Hackett's absolution on his pastoral Spanish grant. There were other outlying cabins along the different streams over his wide domain, for the shelter of the ranch hands in times of severe rainstorms or winter blizzards, but this was the main headquarters, where the army of Mexican and American laborers who tended his flocks and herds, congregated to draw their pay from the foreman. Like a brand on the shoulder, it showed high on the slope leading to the river below.

Dark shadows crept over the foreman's quarters as the last rays of the dying moon threw back a fitful light. The hands were all sleeping, the Mexicans wrapped in their zarapes, out under the stars, just by the door-way of the foreman's long line of cabins. Most of the whites slept inside the cabins to escape the numerous rattlesnakes abounding in the region. This precaution even proved futile sometimes, as it had frequently happened that, upon waking in the morning, some one of the cattle herders had found a rattler peacefully sleeping, coiled up in his bed.

One of the Mexicans was not sleeping, but was as quiet under his blanket as any of the others whose deep, regular breathing told they were off to dreamland. The man awake was Gavino Martinez, whose father had led one of the guerrilla bands of the earlier days. He was not of the peonage, but he was in hiding as a common gaucho to escape the heavy hand of the law for a murder he had committed down on the Rio Grande, or Rio Brava as the stream was earlier known. The old order of things had passed away when a man who had an enemy he hated could seek him out, murder him, and tossing the body in a stream, go on about his business, forgetting his crime. And because of this change in the order of things, Gavino Martinez was in hiding as a common herder on the Montezuma ranch. He was desperately in love with the little senorita up at the "big house," and the fever is burning hot in his veins to-night. Desperate suggestions are whispering themselves into his ears, as he lies so quietly beneath his blanket under the stars. These same self-suggestions had come to him before, but opportunity had not served him as yet. He knew the thing upon which he had resolved meant swift and certain death should his plans fail him, but for the thing he desired he was fearless to dare and do.

A low whine from old Saucer, the leader of a pack of bear dogs which belonged on the ranch, caused Gavino to prick up his ears and listen.

He heard the door of one of the cabins open, and old Saucer bounded through the open door-way with a vicious growl. It was the foreman who had opened the door; and simultaneously with the dog's savage growl came the shrill scream of a panther, which sounded but a few feet away. The sleeping Mexicans, now wide awake, sprang from beneath their blankets, self-preservation driving them headlong into the cabins. All but Martinez, who remained where he was, sullen and defiant in the face of imminent danger. It meant something he could rend and tear or be torn—something that answered to the savage callings of his desperate nature. The wind was blowing from the direction whence came the cry of the panther, and he knew it could not scent him. Slipping his hand under his head for his pistol, which nightly rested there, he made ready and waited. Hardly had he done so when there came another prolonged, unearthly scream, and by the starlight he could see a long, sinuous body gliding past him toward the corner of one of the cabins. He fired at the bulk, aiming as near the head and shoulders as the starlight could direct him. There followed a succession of savage growls and desperate writhings as his enemy made for him. Martinez had leaped from beneath his blanket at the first firing of his pistol, and as the panther made for him, dragging a useless foreleg as it bounded forward, he sent two quick, successive shots full into its breast. The cowboys all came pouring out of the cabin

doors, which had been flung wide open at the sound of the first shot, consternation upon their faces, for all within had supposed no man had been left outside. They reached the scene just as the panther made the attack on the Mexican, who met his antagonist with the last two shots. With the men came old Saucer, the bear hound, who plunged with one bound into the growling mass, still charging defiantly upon the Mexican.

Over and under, above and beneath, eye to eye and breast to breast, leaping and straining, the fight between the supple, enduring strength of the toughened well-trained bear dog and the cushioned muscles that rippled and knotted and twisted beneath the glossy skin of the panther. Lights were hastily brought out, and the men looked on, fascinated with the scene before them, crying out words of encouragement to the dog, such as, "Eat him up, Saucer!" "Good old dog!" "Go after him, Saucer!" "Get at his throat, Saucer!" The men spoke in low, encouraging tones as they urged their favorite on. Furious oaths blended with the savage growls of the fighting beasts. Gashing claws ripped bloody furrows on chest and sides as the dog and panther each sought for a vantage grip to kill each other. The panther lost his guard once —he was handicapped by his desperate wounds —and the slip gave the dog the victory. He opened his mouth, now filled with bloody spume, and clutching the panther's throat, closed his massive jaws down with a vice-like grip, keep-

ing skilfully out of the way of the panther's feet, that were now striking at him aimlessly and without effect. The struggle over, the men rubbed the dog down, sewed up his wounds, washed out his mouth, and rubbed the strained muscles to prevent soreness. The panther measured twelve feet, so the cowboys said, from the tip of the tail to the point of the ear.

The news was carried to the main ranch at the earliest peep of dawn, for the men slept no more that night at the foreman's cabin quarters, for they were busy about the corrals quieting the snorting, plunging horses that had been panic-stricken by the screams of the panther, who had been lured to his death by the scent of fresh blood from a beef that had been butchered that day.

The men from the "big house" came down to look upon the scene of the battle and view the desert slayer, and Chiketa came with them. Gavino and Saucer were the heroes of the hour that day. Once the girl was near the Mexican as he stood leaning his shoulder against the wall of one of the huts. Fairfax was beside her and they were looking at the dead panther. The girl looked up into the Mexican's face with a gentle smile as she said: "How brave you were to remain out here all alone to protect the horses from being mangled by this beast. I will ask the padre to remember and reward your courage."

"It was nothing, senorita," said the Mexican,

as he lifted his dirty sombrero and turned his face away, blinded by the soft beauty of her girlish face, the hot blood running riotously in his veins and sweeping away all bridges of safety.

Once, that day, Lieutenant Fairfax found Chiketa alone, and coming close to her side he said to her in his gentlest and most tender tones, "To please me, Chiketa, won't you dress yourself up in the little deer-skin boots, doublets, leggins, and spurs you wore that day up there on the desert when I first met you?"

She tried to laugh aside his wooing, but every jesting word she could think of died upon her lips, and her color deepened beneath his compelling gaze. "If you wish it; but the senora says I am too much of a grown-up to still wear such clothes."

"I like them," he said. "To me you are the most beautiful girl in all the world, no matter whether the gown you wear be of silk or cotton, but I shall always like you best as I first saw you that day."

Like a flash of sunshine the girl disappeared, her heart light with its bursting happiness, and her feet moving as if treading the wind. She was glad, because she loved him and because the look in his face and the soft tenderness in his voice told her that he loved her. How quickly a woman's intuition tells her when she is the center of the universe to the heart of her best beloved! The girl returned to him her other self, garbed in the clothes she loved best, and in which

her limbs could move freely. The little spurs were jingling, and the sheathed knife protruded from her pocket just as it did the day she cooked his dinner for him over the sage-brush fire.

"Now come let us go for a ride," he said, "and we will try the speed of our horses as we did that day."

She passed on before him as they went in search of their horses, giving him a bantering reply as she laughingly said: "Oh, Lieutenant, there is no cayuse in all the Pecos and Nueces valleys, or from north country either, that can beat my Red Calf in a long run."

She was herself now, and his heart bounded with gladness. He told himself that he didn't care if he never saw her in those horrible skirts again. "It is like tying the wings of some bright-plumaged bird," was his inward thought as he watched her natural grace, as she vaulted lightly into her saddle, her pony starting into a spirited gallop, and he following by her side. They rode for long hours and visited many points of interest about the ranch, much the same as she and Antone had ridden just the day before; but her heart is singing a new, happy tune to-day, and her laugh is full of merriment and glee. She leading and he following, they rode over wide stretches of prairie, up dale and down dale, over marshy places, across the river, and through seas of tall, waving grass that swept their saddle girths.

About one o'clock they rode out on a high

plateau, hoppled out their horses to graze, and went about preparing their own dinner. The girl brought forth from her grub-sack, attached to the back of her saddle, many good things she had beguiled from old black Mandy before starting on their jaunt. She spread them all out on the grass in tempting array, and then sat down with her comrade to eat. They were both hungry from their long ride, and they soon dispatched their meal, after which they sat for a long time talking. Once the lieutenant rose to look after the hopples on the horses, to be sure they were secure. The girl looked after him, surveying his finely knit form with the critical eye of a connoisseur. The symmetrical lines, melting one into the other, of his powerful limbs, pleased her girlish fancy. Again did the waves of regret for the lost opportunities of the school-room beat upon her soul, and when he came back to her, from attending to the horses, he found that a shadow had crept into her face. He had no sooner resumed his seat than she touched upon the subject that gave her such soreness of mind, by saying to him, "The padre and the senora both think I need to go back to the convent to school, Lieutenant." She looked searchingly into his face, where she expected to see her doom, for within her soul she loathed and hated the strict confinement of the convent walls, but she was ready and willing, if the lieutenant thought as her parents did, to go back to school. Nay, if it pleased him, and he wished it,

she would study hard and become a smart, educated young lady, like those eastern belles he knows and must think so very fine, she told herself with bitter regret.

"I judge by the look on your face, senorita, that you do not like the seclusion of the convent," answered the lieutenant, half smilingly.

"It is dreadful, dreadful!" and she breathed in long draughts of the fragrant air playing about them.

"Then why go?" he questioned.

"The padre wishes it; the senora wishes it, and you—you must see yourself, Lieutenant, that I am not like other girls. I don't care for the things other girls like. To me the free life of the plains, with the wind singing its many songs as it sweeps through the tall grasses and plays over the wild flowers, is one long, happy day. The padre wishes that I should be like those eastern belles, who can sing, and play the melodeon, and paint pictures, and do all sorts of things. Do you think a girl is nicer who can do all that?" In her desperation she was putting the question to him direct.

"It all depends," said the lieutenant, dreading almost to breathe loud lest he startle her into dropping a veil over her heart, which she was so innocently laying bare before him. He waited, listening, and hoping she would take up the same strain again. Her face showed some inward struggle was goin on.

"I can try once more. If the padre and the

senora and—and—you wish me to go back to the convent I'll go—but oh, if the senora had never allowed me to leave off skirts. They make me feel as a horse looks wearing hopples!"

A roaring burst of laughter escaped the lieutenant, and joyfully flinging his arms close about her, he gathered her to his bosom and covered her face with kisses. Holding her from him as he looked at her, his eyes dancing with merriment, he said: "So you want to be like those eastern belles, and go through life wearing hopples like our cayuses?"

She did not answer him, but was struggling hard to loosen herself from his embrace. Touching her cheek with his palm as he pressed his face close to hers, he said, in his softest and most gentle tones: "There, there, now, my little eaglet, don't beat your wings so hard; you are captured, and your captor will see that they don't tame your spirit and train you to sing like the canary in his narrow cage!" Lifting her face to his, he gently kissed her red lips. She smiled back at him and lay passive in his arms, out there beneath the southern sun and the sweetness of its tropical perfumes.

He talked to her and told her how he would himself be her tutor in any branch of study she should ever care to follow. "But my little wife will never be more charming to me than as she is to-day. The padre and the senora must go with us to San Antonio, where we can find a priest to perform the all-important ceremony."

"And I'll study hard, Lieutenant, and you will help me with my lessons, and when they get dull and I am tired, we will go for a long, long ride over the prairies!"

"That we will; and you can study when you like, and when you don't want to you can spend the time talking to me," replied the ardent lover.

"And there will be no convent walls to shut out the blue sky and the sunshine," cried the delighted girl, as she sprang from her seat, gave a hitch to her little leggins and began gathering up the cooking utensils with which they had prepared their dinner. She rolled them up in the blanket and tied them fast behind her saddle again, while Lieutenant Fairfax went for their horses. With the graceful ease he loved so well, he saw her vault lightly into her saddle, and start on ahead of him in a slow, easy canter. Red Calf, her pony, seemed to catch the happy throb in the heart of his mistress, and surging against his martingales, he indulged in a series of prancings and playful frolickings. He was a bright sorrel, with graceful limbs, built for fleetness and endurance; his name had been taken from that of an Indian chief.

Antone had sulked all day, and in his heart swore vengeance against the lieutenant, while Gavino Martinez swore deep in his heart a bitter revenge upon Antone. Lieutenant Fairfax was an unknown quantity to him in the struggle for the little senorita's love. He knew he could

never win against the rich Spaniard from San Antonio. He was handicapped in every way. So he had decided, in the frenzy of his desperation, to kidnap the girl and carry her away bodily, and for this he was biding his time until a favorable opportunity presented itself. The smile she had given him as she stood by the dead panther had sent the warm blood, like an electrical wave, tingling through his veins, and hurried him in his plans for the abduction.

Lieutenant Fairfax and his little fiancée parted at the gateway upon returning from their long ride, the lieutenant to go with his host, who wished to show him some fine merinos just brought in from his flocks.

Chiketa had found Antone at her elbow soon after her return, and at his urgent request she walked with him down the garden path, past the beds of catnip, sage, and tansy, down to where the narrow walk led into the open, through the little picket gate leading to the big blackberry patch that ran along the back of the garden. The berry brambles grew thick amid a scattering growth of low scrub oaks. Antone was telling her that he was leaving the next day for San Antonio, and that he wanted to talk to her before leaving, and that this was why he wished her to walk with him to where they could be alone for a few moments. He did not intend to return until she asked him to come, he told her, for he felt he had been insulted by the way she had treated him in spending the entire day with that "ruf-

fian ranger," as he termed the lieutenant. They were in the depths of the berry-copse, where the zig-zag path they had been following had led them. The girl sought to convince him of his foolishness in thinking as he did, and hotly denied the charge of "ruffian" against the lieutenant. Neither of them saw the brambles near them moving as they were slowly parted, and a dark face peered out at them for a moment. It was Martinez. He had seen them walk down the garden path as he was starting for the foreman's quarters, after his work of helping to bring in the sheep from the main flocks. While Fairfax and his host were engaged in admiring the fine merinos, Martinez took a circuitous route, and soon found himself alongside of the couple so deeply engaged in their own thoughts. Cautiously he crept to where they had stopped, still standing as they talked. From shelter to shelter down the way he had followed them; he had his knife out and was feeling along its edge with his calloused finger; his eyes had grown sullen and dangerous, and all his senses were keenly on the alert. One swift bound, a desperate plunge of the knife, and the man talking to the girl amidst the deep falling shadows sank to the earth with a deep groan of agonizing pain. Far away, Lieutenant Fairfax heard what sounded to him like a woman's scream; then all was still.

Grasping the girl tightly in his arms, after having securely gagged her and bound her limbs,

the Mexican moved with swift-flying feet through the deepening shadows, making for the heavier timber along the river. A restlessness swept over Fairfax, caused by an inward sense as of some impending peril, coming from whence he could not tell. He and his host were walking toward the house from the sheep corrals, when a chubby black face, with rolling eyes, dashed up before them. "Please, massa—M-m-i-s-s—Keta k-k-i-lled!" "What's that?" both of the startled men question simultaneously, Hackett grabbing the stuttering negro by the arm and shaking him until his teeth chattered, he was so excited. Stuttering, and half dead from fright, the little negro finally made them understand what he had to tell. It was Solomon, the ebony-faced son of the house slave, old black Mandy, the cook. He had been "twisting" a rabbit out of a hollow tree with a long switch, when a man came running close by him, stooping and hiding as he ran; then he stopped still, and then he jumped over the blackberry briers, holding a long knife in his hand. The negro declared he heard a man groan, and saw Miss Keta carried away by the man who had the knife. The lieutenant's face was white, with a cold, set look, as he put the trembling negro in front of him and said peremptorily: "Move on ahead. Lead the way and show us the place where all this happened." Rolling his eyes in a backward glance to see that protection was following close behind, the negro boy ran with swift-flying feet

down the garden path and through the picket gate leading into the blackberry patch. Fairfax was right at his heels, both of them following the winding path in its circuitous turns, until they stumbled over the prostrate form of the wounded man of whom they were in search.

Fairfax bent over the prostrate form and straightened it from the cramped position in which it had fallen. A groan, faint but distinct, came from the lips of Antone, as the lieutenant bent over him. "Who did this?" asked the ranger, in eager, tense tones, fearing lest death might cheat him of that knowledge. He was down on his knees by the dying man's side, his ear close to his mouth. He caught the name plainly—Antone had recognized his murderer during the brief second the knife had flashed in the air above him—and the name came distinctly from his lips as Fairfax bent his listening ear to catch the whispered word "Mar-ti-nez!'

Springing erect, the lieutenant looked about him at the crowd of laborers who had followed after him, Hackett, and the negro boy. "Who is Martinez?" he questioned of every one and any one who might answer first. His tones were harsh and commanding. Several voices answered: "The man what killed the painter down to the furman's quarters las' night!"

"Ah! I remember him!" said the lieutenant, who instantly recalled the man standing by the cabin wall, in the early forenoon, when he and

Chiketa were looking at the dead panther. With cool presence of mind the ranger had ordered his horse saddled and brought on after him as he started with the negro boy to find the place where the tragedy had occurred. Calling the negro boy, he made him show him the direction in which the man was running with the girl in his arms when he saw him last. "Right dat way, massa; right dat way," pointing toward the river, where the timber gradually thickened until it swelled into a dense, dark body.

Fairfax was into his saddle and off like a flash through the timber and on toward the river, closely followed by Hackett and a number of the hands, all mounted on swift horses and heavily armed. The body of the wounded man was left in the care of Senora Hackett—some half dozen of the men had carried Antone to the house—while the lieutenant and Hackett led the way in their search for the missing girl. The news was carried to the foreman's quarters, and the cowboys joined in the chase, breathing curses of vengeance against the greaser when once he was found.

Martinez had failed to make his plans work. His intention all along had been to secure a good mount when he made the abduction, but the opportunity to secure his horse and saddle had not come, hence he was forced to swim the river with the girl tied upon his back—for cross the river he must before he could reach his hiding-place, the underground passage of the

old ruined mission down in the valley, more than nine miles away.

Though helpless in the hands of her captor, the girl's courage did not forsake her. She saw they were entering the woods leading to the river. She realized the desperate situation she was in, and with no hope for help, as Antone's lips were closed in death ere this, and in that lonely place no one would find him until, by accident, his rotting body might be found. She felt for her sheath-knife, and, to her great joy, it was still in her hip pocket. It was then she began to plan a desperate risk to secure her freedom. Cautiously, carefully, she slipped the knife with her hands tied at her back. Her heart bounded with joy as she at last felt her knife in her hands. Jolting and bumping over stumps and rough places they went. Their progress was slow, for their way was leading through rough places. Carefully she cut the cords holding her hands, and then, crooking her feet and legs upward until they met her hands, she carefully cut the leather thongs binding her feet. At last they reached the river, and her captor placed his burthen upon the ground. She carefully maintained the semblance of still being bound fast, both hand and foot. While her captor busied himself making preparations to cross the river the girl decided to take her chances, and springing to her feet she darted away from him through the darkness, her sheath-knife drawn and her mind filled with the

determination to plunge it deep into his heart if he recaptured her.

"Caramba!" hissed the Mexican, as he dashed through the darkness after the fleeing girl, who had cut the cords from her limbs, and with her freed hands had removed the rag he had stuffed and tied into her mouth. Into the darkest places she plunged, seeking to blur his view of her fleeing figure. Crossing and doubling on the track, rabbit fashion, she sped swiftly on, gaining ground on him with every step. Afar in the distance she heard voices and the beat of horses' feet, and hope dawned in her heart; but her breath was coming hard, and her knees were growing weak. She summoned all her courage to the effort, and with a last fresh spurt of speed she entered the open, making for the ranch. The blood was rushing into her ears with drum-like beats; there was a heavy pain tugging at her breast, but she kept on, for now she could hear men's voices closer, hallooing to each other. Her pursuer's breath was labored, too, and she could hear his foot-beats close behind her. With one last desperate effort to save herself she gave forth a dry, screeching cry of "Help, h-e-l-p!" and then the blackness of unconsciousness enveloped her.

When she came to herself she was in her own bed, and the senora's arms were clasped around her. The padre was there, too, and he had cried until his eyes were all bloodshot. The lieutenant also was there, so tall, so handsome and so

big, and looking at her now with such unutterable things in his fine blue eyes. They nursed her back to strength, and when she asked for Antone they told her he had been taken to San Antonio. She was quiet for a long time after they told her, but she never asked, for somehow she knew that the next she would see—and all she would ever see—of Antone again would be his grave. It was more than a year before they told her how the Mexican had been lynched where he was captured, and his body flung into the river to rot. She was the lieutenant's wife then, and it was he himself who told her. It was he who had heard her cry of despair, just as he had heard the half-smothered cry she had given when first captured. The Mexican, seeing he was hard pressed, was turning from the chase and seeking to evade capture, but the woods were full of men and there was no escape for him. The cowboys had swung him up to the first limb and filled his body with bullets.

Antone's body was taken to San Antonio, and his mother requested that he be buried in the flower court of the old Arguella home; and it was there that the only girl he had ever loved came one day to strew flowers upon his grave. Fairfax stood by his wife's side, his hate removed and his head bowed, while in his heart was a sad regret for the untimely death of the man filling such an early grave, for a closer tie than merely man to man had bound them. Only just across the river, in the shadow of the old

Alamo, had both their fathers died, true friends to the last, and doubly true to their country and to their loved ones.

It is to-day a far cry that reaches back to that time. The old town has lifted herself out of all the difficulties that beat upon her, and is acknowledged in foreign lands, as well as under the "Red, White and Blue," to be a queen of royal heritage. No people are more genial, more glad of heart, or more delightful to meet than her handsome men and fair-faced women. The old-time chivalry of the South is among them. Down from Government Hill sweeps the gay military equipages, filled with the flower of the American army, showing that still the old town above the forks of the rivers holds to her first love—that of the brilliant attachés of military life.

The turbulent, vehement military post of old has grown into a beautiful modern city of colossal wealth and palatial homes. Tourists from afar come to seek benefit for their health, and to look upon her majestic sweeps of beautiful scenery. Throughout the long, leafy summers the heat is tempered by the strong, cooling breeze blowing constantly from the Gulf, and the salubrious temperature of her winters fills the mind of the jaded tourist with thoughts of Cairo and Sorrento.

The many windings of the river, as it crooks and turns in its thirteen-mile journey through the city, are spanned by numerous artistic

bridges, from which the observer catches glimpses of picturesque and lovely scenery, under a soft climate outrivaling that of the Riviera.

Out on Government Hill is the beautiful post and military reserve, Fort Sam Houston, whose name commemorates the daring, dauntless and indefatigable Indian scout who led his men to victory against the Mexican army at the battle of San Jacinto. In the first flush of the full springtime of each succeeding year the city bedecks herself in wondrous beauty for the "Battle of flowers" on "San Jacinto day." This is a memorial of love given by the chivalrous Texans to the memory of their illustrious dead who fought with General Houston at San Jacinto.

Its climatic attractions, great beauty of natural scenery, vast wealth, and the refinement and hospitality of its people, together with its interesting historical associations, make the San Antonio of to-day one of the most charmingly picturesque and delightful cities to be chronicled in the memory of the world-traveled tourist and pleasure-seeker. Where the old tournament grounds once stood is now a beautiful modern country clubhouse, whose golf links and tennis grounds give recreation for the fashionable society world.

All through the passing of the years she has held intact her love for the militant, and, with the marked enthusiasm of old, great crowds of

her people will gather to witness the military reviews and artillery drills of the large garrison on Government Hill. Also has she clung to her first and oldest religious faith, gracing her streets with beautiful cathedrals and numerous Roman Catholic churches, convents, and hospitals. The old historic Alamo still stands, a silent, suggestive testimony of the terrible days when the town was enduring her bitterly contested struggles for existence. The more credulous towns-folk aver that the real live ghost of David Crockett nightly haunts its silent, solitary chambers, and for this the old place, with its moat-like separation from the main part of the city, is shunned by the ignorant and superstitious after the coming of nightfall—a crumbling monument to an out-worn and brilliant tyranny, now happily ended.

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